

THE SEER'S HOUSE

“Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer’s house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.”

—I Samuel IX: 18, 19.

THE
SEER'S HOUSE

Interpretations and Meditations

by

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A



To My Wife

AMY FRANCES SPENCER

*Who in the bright and in the dark
has interpreted for me the meaning of the Saints*

PREFACE

IF "The Seer's House" seems to be a presumptuous title for this book, it is so unintentionally. "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer." Not only was he beforetime called a Seer, but he was more humble in his offices, a dignity being added with the new name. At all events, when young Saul, the son of Kish, stood sandal-deep in the morning dew, seeking his father's strayed asses, it was to none other than a humble house that he went, and to a man who tried to help people find "lost things."

I have tried in these pages to find some lost things; things lost, it may have been, through familiarity's careless contempt, or in the feverish ways of our time. Through my bit of smoked glass I have looked at the burning noons of the Bible, and have peered into that meridian darkness that clouded its most significant hour. Here I have again read the pages of the Psalmists, trying to discover what was so human in them, why they

were almost the daily bread of our Divine Redeemer, when He walked in our human paths, and why they have been "woven into the hymns and prayers of nineteen centuries of Christian history." With Whittier, as interpreter, I have studied, stanza by stanza, that great hymn which seems to gather up, as into a point of light, all the glory of God and all the wistful searchings of mankind.

There are Seers in this book, and I hope they may speak to you, as they have spoken to me, a seeker like yourselves. The book is an exploration, and, like Kipling's "Explorer"—

Thence I ran my first rough survey—chose my trees and blazed
and ringed 'em—

Week by week I pried and sampled—week by week my find-
ings grew.

Saul he went to look for donkeys, and by God he found a
kingdom!

But by God, who sent His Whisper, I had struck the worth
of two!

—but to find two kingdoms' worth in these pages is perhaps too much to hope. . . .

The substance of these chapters was spoken on noon-days in Lent, in Saint Bartholomew's Church, New York; in Saint Paul's Church, Baltimore; in Christ Church, Houston, and in the Harris Theatre, Chicago. They have been rewritten and prepared especially for publication, though here and there much of the freedom of the spoken word has been allowed to stand.

On the walls of the Seer's house, I have seen many pictures—pictures I have appropriated to hang upon

my memory, that have illuminated some Truth for me, and helped me to retain that Truth. Effort has been made to give credit to these artists for their color and light, and if I have failed to find their *pinxit*, I am grateful nonetheless. Quotations may not always be verbatim, even those from the Holy Scriptures, and those, since there are so many versions, would be hard to trace. Of these last, I hope I have been substantial, if not verbal, or in so far as to clear me of that charge of taking anything "away from the words of the Book of that prophecy." In respect to other imperfections or mistakes in my matter, I will be as honest as Doctor Johnson, and, with far more cause, plead as he did: "Ignorance, Sir or Madam; sheer ignorance!" And one further anticipation of the reader's reaction to my interpretations of these themes, I too can hear him saying with a character in Sheridan's play: "Egad, I think the interpreter is the hardest to be understood of the two!"

I wish to thank the distinguished publishers of my book, though the courtesy and helpfulness of that House are so proverbial as not to need mention. Also my thanks are due to Mrs. Ann Campbell Clinton who patiently typed these pages from my not too legible notes.

R. N. S.

Kansas City, Missouri

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PART ONE

*

THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

I

OUR FEVERISH WAYS

II

THE GRACIOUS CALL

III

THE SILENCE OF ETERNITY

IV

THE BEAUTY OF HIS PEACE

V

THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF CALM

*

"Then he went on till he came to the House of the Interpreter, where he knocked over and over. At last one came to the door, and asked who was there.

" 'Sir,' said Christian, 'I am a man that am come from the City of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion; and I was told by the man that stands at the gate at the head of this way, that if I called here you would show me excellent things, such as would be an help to me on my journey.'

"Then said the Interpreter, 'Come in. . . .'

—The Pilgrim's Progress

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
 Forgive our feverish ways.
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
 In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
 Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
 Rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
 O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity
 Interpreted by love!

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
 Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
 The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
 Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire.
 O still, small voice of calm.

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

I

OUR FEVERISH WAYS

SOMETIMES there is put into a hymn, as there is put into a psalm—into the Twenty-third Psalm for example—all the shepherding love of God. Such a hymn is Whittier's "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." Perhaps I could not do better than take the first stanza of that hymn to serve as a text:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our *feverish* ways.
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

You will have noticed perhaps that I changed a word in the stanza—I changed the word "foolish"—forgive our *foolish* ways, as it is printed in the *Hymnal*, to "forgive our *feverish* ways." But I did not make that change without warrant. It may be that Whittier did write "foolish," though in some editions of his poem it is not so. And you can readily see that what the Quaker Poet meant was "feverish" and not foolish; for in the very next breathe he says: "Reclothe us in our rightful mind."

Our ways are foolish enough, God knows. But foolishness does not derange the mind. We are foolish when we do not use the mind. But fever causes delirium; it strips the mind of its faculties; and so Whittier says: "Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our *feverish* ways, and reclothe us in our rightful mind."

Let us look at our Feverish Ways as they run straight across every common day. You remember Alice in the Land of the Looking Glass? You remember how Alice and the Red Queen set out one morning to run, and how they ran all the morning, and how the Red Queen kept shouting to Alice: "Faster, Faster." And when it was near noon, and Alice was ready to collapse, they stopped to rest under a tree. When Alice got her breath and looked around, she could not believe her eyes; for they were resting under the selfsame tree as that from which they had set out to run. Alice thought at first that they had run in a circle; but that couldn't be. And so Alice exclaimed in amazement: "Why, we are just where we started!" "To be sure," said the Red Queen, "what would you have?" "Well, in my country," Alice said, "when you run hard for hours you usually get somewhere." "Not here," said the Red Queen, "here you just have to keep on running to stay where you are." Oh, how like the Red Queen's country is this United States!

In these days of candid camera shots let me give you one from Gerald Stanley Lee: "Every idea we have is run into a constitution. We cannot think without a chairman. Our whims have secretaries; our fads have by-laws. Literature is a club. Philosophy is a society.

Our reforms are mass meetings. Our culture is a summer school. We cannot mourn our mighty dead without hiring a hall and electing forty vice-presidents. We remember our poets with trustees, and the immortality of a genius is watched by a standing committee. Charity is an association. Theology is a set of resolutions. Religion is an endeavor to be numerous and communicative. We awe the impenitent with crowds, convert the world with boards, and save the lost with delegates; and how Jesus of Nazareth could have done so great a work without being on a committee is beyond our ken. What Socrates and Solomon would have come to if they had only had the advantage of conventions it is hard to say; but in these days when the stream-liner is applied to wisdom; when having little enough we try to make it more by pulling it about; when secretaries urge us, treasurers dun us, and programs unfold out of every mail—where is the man who, guileless-eyed, can look in his brother's face; can declare upon his honor that he has never been nominated, elected, insulted, or imposed on in his life?"¹

And if man's way in this whirligig of a world is a feverish way, what shall we say of woman's way? At least in her world there must be some leisure time, some time to choose that better part for quietness and meditation, as Jesus said Mary had chosen it at Bethany. But alas! the Mary of our Bethany seems to be as busy as any man of us all in a ceaseless round of social engagements. Two or three years ago in crossing the continent in the National Preaching Mission, we

¹*Crowds*, p. 24. Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc.

stopped long enough at Ponca City, Oklahoma, to go outside the town and view that finest, as I think, of all the statues of the Pioneer Mother. We stood there, the frost on the grass making the only sound as our feet broke its glasslike fragility, gazing up at that heroic Pioneer Mother who, with her boy at her side, strode untrumpeted through our American past. Many and many there had been like her, the pioneer women of a nation, who did the woman's work that made that nation, and who yet refused to allow the fever of life to consume their spirits. The day before yesterday those women were rising before the day to milk the cows, to prepare the breakfast, to do the housework, to attend to their children. They spun the family clothing and shaped the garments with their own hands. They were both physician and nurse, gathering medicinal herbs in the fields for their healing, and watching by their bedsides through the night. Yet they loved life, those women, and thrilled to the barn-dance, or the simple party games. And they sang at their work, and found time to love God, and to look up at the stars.

There under the Oklahoma moonlight, I thought, "O Shakespeare, if there only could be sermons in stones, or in bronze, I could wish that those sculptured lips might speak! I wish she might speak just once to that drooping, discontented sisterhood of our time; that she might ask why life is apparently too much for them; why they go so feverish all their days. Is it because you have to have life, so apparent in that heroic figure, to love life?"

Do you think that all the Revelation of God is writ-

ten in the Bible? Well, it isn't. It is written in those sculptured Pioneer Women in San Francisco and Kansas City and Ponca City. It is written in Alice's race with the Red Queen, which got them no farther than the squirrel gets running around the wheel in his cage. It is written in Omar's ancient comment on our modern debates in economics and politics and religion:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went.

In these numerous references to literature I am only trying to do what Jesus did when He told one story after another about a lost sheep and a lost coin and a lost boy, in order to drive home by the use of illustration how lost we all are, and how He was sent not to scold us for being lost, but to seek and to save us from our lostness. No; not all of the Word of God is in what we call the "Word of God," that is to say the Bible; but it is written where the ink is scarcely dry upon it in these modern instances, which lead directly to that word of Jesus our Lord: "Come unto me, ye weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

But let us turn more intimately from the feverish world to our feverish selves. . . .

Could there be a deeper need of humanity today than that we should be forgiven our fevers! Maude Royden tells us of having gone into a wretched house in Whitechapel to try to help a poor mother there who was holding in her arms a fevered and delirious child.

The child was screaming, "Mother, mother, mother," over and over again, wanting its mother, when all the time the mother was holding the child against her breast. "Yes, darling," she kept saying, "Mother is here; Mother is holding you in her arms." Maude Royden uses that as a great parable. "So lies our sick world in the arms of God." That is not to say that our sick world is always crying God's name as that delirious child screamed "mother." I dare say there are many out there in the feverish ways who do not specifically want God at all. But they want something. They want peace; they want something to fill the emptiness of their souls; they want something more than pleasures; for pleasures have sated them, but never satisfied them. Somehow life's game has eluded them, and they are bewildered, empty, disillusioned. And they don't get any better; because fever always feeds on the very substance in which it dwells. They want what St. Augustine wanted in his feverish ways. He did not want God specifically; so he prayed that impious prayer that we all pray at times; he prayed: "O God, make me good; but not now!" God did want to make Augustine good, but first of all He wanted to make Augustine better of his fever. And St. Augustine learned that at last, and stopped screaming, and he said that great thing: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

And there was that mighty spiritual poet, Francis Thompson, rotting of his fever of dissipation and despair in the gutters of London. He knew much of the Christ; but his feverish ways burned in him. He says that he pleaded like an outlaw to escape Christ, "Lest

having Him I must have naught beside." What fanaticism; what puritan prejudice and bigotry; what total misrepresentation of the Happy Christ made that delirium in Francis Thompson's soul: "Lest having Him I might have naught else." What a libel on Christ that is! But Francis Thompson got over that fever, and the delirium disappeared, and he heard Christ saying to his reclothed mind:

All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"²

Do you see, from the mighty Augustine out there in the fourth century, to the mighty mystic, Francis Thompson, in the twentieth century, there stretch the multitudes of a mad and feverish humanity. Not many of them are as articulate as St. Augustine or Francis Thompson; but they have the same fever and want the same thing.

But perhaps you would like to take this thing to the Gospel itself. What did Jesus have to do actually with these feverish ways? How does He reclothe us in our rightful minds? To answer these questions we have the incident in the Gospels of the healing of the demented man at Gadara. You know how Jesus went to that place, and found a man there who was demented, and who made his home among the tombs—that is to say, in

²From *The Hound of Heaven*.

a graveyard. As you read that story in the Gospels you might think that the man of Gadara lets us out. That is to say, he is plain crazy; he is tormented by devils, and we do not use that language any more.

Well, we must remember that this picture in the Gospels is not a photograph. It is rather more like a cartoon. And a cartoon is purposely distorted, it is outrageously overdone for the sake of emphasis. I think it is so with the demoniac of Gadara. I think he is just as sane as scores of people you and I know. Let us look at this Gadara fellow. He may be mad, and yet he is uncannily sane. For what is he doing? He recognizes Jesus; he knows Jesus can help him; and yet he says, "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" Do you know people like that?

He recognizes that Jesus has the Truth; but he is afraid of the truth. Do you know people like that?

He says that he wants life! life! life! And yet he makes his home in a graveyard. Do you know people like that? I know people who spend every night of their lives, almost, in night clubs, and when I ask them why they do it, "Oh," they say, "it is the life." Is it the life? I'm not talking about its sin; I am talking about its silliness. It is the surest way to undermine life. And yet they call this Gadara chap, wanting life and yet living in a graveyard, where there is no life at all—they call him crazy!

As Doctor J. S. Whale of Cambridge says in his comment on this Gadara incident: "Is this man any crazier than we are?" We have virtually cried out with this man: "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son

of the Most High God?" And we have answered our question again and again. We cannot let Jesus alone because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We cannot find words of our own to tell of the wonder of Him and so we borrow words from *Te Deum*: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father." We believe it to be true that to defy Christ is to defy the eternal meaning of the Universe. We believe that to fight against Him is as futile as to spit at the stars. But do we want Him as we want certain other things? It has been said that Jesus is the only real Christian in the ages, and it is true. I know that I am celestial diameters short of being a real Christian. And you know in your heart of hearts that you are too. But we want Him to let us alone. Has He come here to destroy us? Leave us alone to destroy ourselves! Set us free; but not now! You remember that the owners of the swine came out and asked Jesus if He would kindly get out of that neighborhood. We may not want the New Deal on the one hand; but do we want what some call the "System" on the other? If the New Deal has done us irreparable damage, the old "System" mighty near drowned us all along with the swine. What have we in America, and in this mad century—"What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?"

Well, let us ask this question: "What have we to do with Him who came to save us from Life's fever?" Perhaps we have this to do. We have to do what I have been trying to do here. To stand forth and say, we do not need to catch the fever in a feverish age. We can

pray for some tranquillity in the midst of our toil. We can pray that our hot temper may be controlled lest it make life's hot temperament hotter than it is. We can say, Mr. Bishop, you are not to be arrogant because you are a Bishop, for remember the first of the Bishops was a fisherman and never flaunted a Bishop's lawn sleeves in his whole life. We can say, Mr. Priest, do you not put on priestly airs, for Christ forbade you to call yourself "master." We can say, Mr. Layman, and Madam Laywoman, in life's piping and dancing, what is there in your example and character which would lead others to suspect that your claim to being a Christian makes you any different from any worldling in your city? We cannot turn the world back to the horse and buggy days, and perhaps that would not be desirable if we could; but we can be quiet a little while each day and pray such a prayer as this:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our feverish ways.
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

Will you promise to pray that prayer when the fever gets too much for you? Will you pray it for your own sake? Will you pray it for Jesus Christ—His sake?

II

THE GRACIOUS CALL

NOW WE turn to "The Gracious Call of Jesus"; and we have, for text, the second stanza of Whittier's great hymn:

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee.

Well, we have a simple trust in Him that is like theirs in that glad, new morning when He came calling His first disciples. I believe if He were to come to us in the very flesh, as He came to them, and were to call us to leave our business, or our professional duties, or our typewriters, or our merchandising, or our economic worries, or our household cares—if we could leave it all behind us, and take to the road after those sandalled feet, we should do it gladly. Yes; if "without a word," we could rise up and follow Him, we should do it gladly. We should do it for the reason that this stanza in Whit-

tier's hymn brings a kind of homesickness to our souls.

But it isn't as easy as that, is it? The sun rising over that Syrian sea is the same sun, but it is different when it rises over these tall buildings and these canyon streets, with their swift human rivers, that like "Ol' Man River" just keeps rollin' along." There is that first morning of the gracious call as it broke upon those fishermen, and that tax-collector by the name of Levi, and here is our morning as a tired cynic said of it:

Yonder see the morning blink;
The sun is up, and up must I,
To bathe and dress and eat and drink,
And work—and God knows why!

Perhaps that is a little too cynical a mood; but I am sure we all have it, especially when we are tired; and that, by the way, is what cynicism mostly is; it is a tired mind talking when it ought to keep still. That mood is expressed in Browning when some one says, as if we were to say it of that Syrian dawn, "never glad, confident morning again."

Well, if we cannot, like them, without a word, rise up and follow Him, let us use that word to argue against our mood. For that is what Christianity is for; it is to take us out of such moods, and to give us that glad, confident morning again. God help these words a little to do that!

For our cynical mood is really the result of an illusion—an illusion that all distant things have. It is the illusion that deceives us as we look back upon our childhood. How wise was mother to say, "There, little girl, don't

cry, they have broken your doll, I know." Or, when the spring broke in the toy fire-engine, and it wouldn't run any more. How silly to think that the bottom had dropped out of our universe because of a broken doll or a ruined toy! Yes; but those tears were very real then! Whittier may write of a simple trust, and the Gospels write that, too; Whittier may write of their rising up and following without a word, and the Gospels say that, too; but there is something between the lines back there, if we could but read it, that would help this illusion of the remote. It has been said that it is always a serious thing to live. That fishing-boat, and those nets drying on a cottage roof, and that tax-collector's table were, to those first disciples, what the two mites were to that widow—they were all their living. Simple as compared with Wall Street and the Santa Fé Railroad—yes, very simple! But they were all *they* had! And at least the "gracious call" is more respectable now than it was then. It was uttered in Galilee, moreover, in that dangerous province which had dreamed so dangerously so many times, dreams that the strong arm from the seven hills had so often reached out to crush! But perhaps the ridicule would be the hardest to answer—and without a word! Do you hear it?

Ye foolish folk of Galilee,
What is it ye went out to see?
The reeds that waver, the weeds that float,
A young man preaching in a boat.¹

Yes; and a young man preaching in a boat of whom

¹Quoted by A. J. Gossip, in *From the Edge of the Crowd*, p. 2.

his own kinsmen whispered that he was crazy in his head! You read again and again that He was mocked. Well they said something of that young man preaching in a boat that made people laugh. "Look out there, or your pulpit will tip over with you! You had better keep your balance on your feet; yes, and you had better keep your balance in your head, too. What you are saying is quite different from what the Hierarchy is saying, and the Hierarchy won't like it. Do you think we are so foolish as to follow your dream?"

Well, they did, a few of them, follow the Dream, and they came to know at least that it was not a dream, "but, lacking it, life's love and lore a dream and all the world a dream."

But let not our illusion of distance deceive us as to the danger. It was not far from that Syrian sea to the great, guilty Capital, as we count miles; but it was an uneasy path before it ended. We turn a few pages in St. Mark, and we have passed from that glad, wordless response to the gracious call to something like this: "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they began to be amazed; and as they followed . . . *they were afraid!* Now get your hymnals and sing:

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,
I should like to have been with them then.

It is a sweet hymn; but it is a childish hymn, and it has

this illusion of the remote of which we have been thinking today.

In this sense, we may be sure that the way of the gracious call is, "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," a narrow way and a straight gate. But it does lead to life—life, not in some heaven by and by, but life here and now, life that is life indeed. Would we have it an easy way? What do we mean by that phrase when we read a play about it? What do we mean when we speak of the "easiest way"? We mean, do we not, at least metaphorically speaking, that it is the way of the damned? We do not need Dante, we need only to stand on a street corner and mark the faces of the dilettante, the disillusioned, the stunted, the dawdlers on the easy way, to understand their damnation. But I suspect we are not of that company; for we are far more likely to see those of that company on a street corner or lolling in a lounge, than in church. No; our trouble is something else. We do not hear the gracious call because it sounds far away, and in our busy traffic we are making too much noise. And, besides, to what do we need to be called? For if a tumultuous and shouting age does not deafen us, our satisfactions do. As Doctor Carl Petty says somewhere: "It is difficult to enlist folks in a crusade to take the Promised Land when they think they are already there, and a generation that rides on a four-lane cement highway will find it hard to see the logic of the straight and narrow road!"

But Whittier, in paraphrasing the Gospel, gives us another modern problem. It is all very well to say, "Let us, like them, without a word, rise up and follow Jesus."

But can we do that? We are a wise people. We have to catechize this Man of the gracious call a little, and that does take words, and words, and more words. We believe that there should be a careful training for discipleship. Even at twelve, the disciples' Master was in the Temple hearing the Doctors and asking them questions; and He said He was about His Father's business in being there. But I think if He were in some of our Confirmation classes, He would say with a tired smile: "It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than it is for these souls to get to an altar-rail and to kneel for the Great Defense!"

In twenty centuries we have accumulated what we call a Theology. Let us not despise it; but it was good to see that one of the greatest theologians in Scotland defended vehemently his thesis that the Saviour of the world is also for "the untheologically minded!" There has to be "A Constitution and Canons," but we know very well that Canon ninety-nine, section eight, subsection thirteen, sometimes makes it impossible for the Body of Christ to move even an eyelash! We have to have what we call a Doctrine, just as He had a Doctrine. But when there was too much of doctrine; when it got in the way of progress; when it perplexed them, or hindered them, what did He say? He said, "Never mind now about the doctrine, do my will and you shall know the doctrine." If we say that we cannot follow Him without a word, because a word shows how intellectual we are, we are by so much putting ourselves beyond the pale of the true intellectuals. Shakespeare wrote a tragedy called *Hamlet* whose very essence is expressed

in one line of fourteen words on Hamlet's lips. "The native hue of resolution," said Hamlet, "is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." That is it; thought, when it stands in the way of a revealed call to action, is always sicklied o'er, it is always pale in cast, because it has no blood in it; because it has no will to do, or to be. There has to be a doctrine, but it must be the doctrine that obeys the will of the Voice. Gibbon had his cheap sneer at the Nicene Creed when he said that "the universal Church once fought over a diphthong." And the Church did fight over a diphthong. It fought, in fact, over the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, and in ours—the letter "i." It fought for that "i" because it determined whether you and I shall say in the Creed that our Lord is "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God," or that we shall believe that He is a creature like ourselves.² God help us if you and I shall not believe what that diphthong stands against, and what it stands for! If this gracious call is not from Very God of Very God, being the only God we can know this side of the grave; if the Christ of that diphthong is not our only Advocate, and to be our only Judge; if He is not ready every moment to save us from our sins, and able to save us, and to save us to the uttermost; if that is not true, then God help us all! But what other God is there

²Gibbon's sneer had to do with the inclusion or exclusion of the letter "i" (the Greek iota) in the word *homoousion* in the Christian Creeds. *Homoousion* means that Jesus Christ is of the *same substance* with the Father. "Homoiousion" means that Jesus Christ is merely of *like substance* with the Father. But so are we all. Hence the phrase "it does not matter an iota." But it does matter. It matters whether the declaration of Jesus, "Because I live, ye shall live also," is the promise of the Eternal God, or the kindly guess of a good man.

But can we do that? We are a wise people. We have to catechize this Man of the gracious call a little, and that does take words, and words, and more words. We believe that there should be a careful training for discipleship. Even at twelve, the disciples' Master was in the Temple hearing the Doctors and asking them questions; and He said He was about His Father's business in being there. But I think if He were in some of our Confirmation classes, He would say with a tired smile: "It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than it is for these souls to get to an altar-rail and to kneel for the Great Defense!"

In twenty centuries we have accumulated what we call a Theology. Let us not despise it; but it was good to see that one of the greatest theologians in Scotland defended vehemently his thesis that the Saviour of the world is also for "the untheologically minded!" There has to be "A Constitution and Canons," but we know very well that Canon ninety-nine, section eight, subsection thirteen, sometimes makes it impossible for the Body of Christ to move even an eyelash! We have to have what we call a Doctrine, just as He had a Doctrine. But when there was too much of doctrine; when it got in the way of progress; when it perplexed them, or hindered them, what did He say? He said, "Never mind now about the doctrine, do my will and you shall know the doctrine." If we say that we cannot follow Him without a word, because a word shows how intellectual we are, we are by so much putting ourselves beyond the pale of the true intellectuals. Shakespeare wrote a tragedy called *Hamlet* whose very essence is expressed

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to help us? There is none other Name in heaven nor in this earth. But Athanasius, a mere boy in years, who fought for that truth, and won it; was he not intellectual? Are you ashamed of him? Do you know what they say of him? They say "*Athanasius contra mundum*," Athanasius against the world! It takes more than a fool to do that! But Athanasius spells action, not words. It was the will of him, not the word of him, that wore the world to silence. We see him going away from Alexandria again and again, so bitter were his opponents, but we always see him coming back—coming back, as a picturesque historian has told us, with that fluttering, shot-torn banner of Christendom's Creed still flying, and the whole of Alexandria "streaming out to meet him like another Nile." Let Gibbon despise that diphthong, but do you not do it. It was like that sorry staff and that sorry flag that some moderns laughed at; but an old soldier who knew did not laugh:

It's a moth-eaten flag, and a worm-eaten pole;
It doesn't look likely to stir a man's soul;
But it's the deeds that were done 'neath that moth-eaten rag,
When the pole was a staff, and the rag was a flag.³

But all I intended to say was, that when young Athanasius went out against the world, he went out not so much with a word as with a will.

We think of Jeanne d'Arc. She was not like Athanasius; she could neither read nor write. But she could hear Voices. She heard them in the orchard at Domremy. But she did not argue with them. Mr. Ches-

³Quoted by Ernest Raymond, in *The Shout of the King*, p. 158.

terton says that when Jeanne d'Arc heard her Voices, she went down her road like a thunderbolt. There was Francis of Assisi. He was more like us. He was satisfied. He had possessions. He had his club and his gay companions. And one night he saw the stars and heard a Voice. They say he took the map of Europe and fashioned it a little into the face of Christ. They say he set all Europe singing. But they also call him "the Little Poor Man"; and they say that he was so simple that he preached to the birds!

Whittier's last word is his greatest word. He calls this a "gracious call"; that is to say, a call full of grace; and that is what the religion of Jesus Christ is all about. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." That is the call, not to those who have grace, but a call to accept His redeeming grace. A call not to a goal, for that is far away for all of us; but a call to take hold a little more bravely upon a way that leads to a goal. A call to a better discipleship, if that may be, but a call never to give up, never to despair. If this gracious call, so poorly uttered in these words, has stirred us at all, then each of us shall know for himself, and no one shall be able to say for any other, how to rise up and follow that call without a word. Let us make it our prayer.

Dear Jesus:
In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee.

III

THE SILENCE OF ETERNITY

THE SILENCE of Eternity is a practical subject. Every one must have felt in some tense moment what Carlyle felt in such a moment, when one suggested to him that at all events "God is in his heaven." "Yes," said Carlyle, "but He doesn't say anything!" What the Gospels have to say of the silence of eternity Whittier has summed up in the third stanza of his hymn:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

Now, there is of course a sabbath-like rest of a lake, whether in Galilee, or in Westchester County; and there is a calm of hills beyond the city's tumult, that have brought to our noise-tormented nerves a benediction, like the peace of God, which passeth understanding. But the kneeling Christ does not have to interpret

that blessing. We apprehend it ourselves by what John Drinkwater calls "Reciprocity":

I do not think that skies or meadows
Are moral, or that the fixture of a star
Comes of a quiet spirit, or that trees
Have wisdom in their windless silences.
Yet these are things invested in my mood
With constancy, and peace, and fortitude;
That in my troubled seasons I can cry
Upon the wide composure of the sky,
And envy fields, and wish that I might be
As little daunted as a star or tree.¹

Thank you, John Drinkwater, in your poet's heaven; we have all been invested with that mood, though we are not so articulate as you to voice it!

Nor does the kneeling Christ have to interpret such a great, elemental thing as Light. We interpret it for ourselves, as when the shepherd of Israel interpreted sunlight or starlight in relation to God's condescension to mankind. Or when Thomas Carlyle, doubting that condescension, looked up to the silent stars and called them "a sair sight!" Or when Immanuel Kant linked the silent heavens with the Moral Law. David and Carlyle and Kant had different interpretations of the eternal silence; but they had interpretations; and so had Tennyson, when sunset and evening star brought, as he said, "one clear call" to him, and the promise of the Pilot's Face.

And so had Jesus an interpretation—a quite practical one—when he said: "When it is evening, ye say, It will

¹*Poems 1918-1919*, p. 1. Houghton Mifflin Company.

be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Well, I am afraid we can't, though we may be more fools than hypocrites in our failure. We all know, for example, that our world today is in a twilight; that in human affairs there is scarcely enough light to see by, let alone to judge by. We may be good weather prophets as to whether it will rain upon our intellectual picnics; but what do we make of this "twilight of the gods"? Surely it matters what we think of it, and what light we invoke for it; it matters whether it is to be a terminal twilight, or whether it is the beginning of a long night!

You will have noticed, however, by the quotation from Matthew, that he does not interpret *these* aspects of the eternal silence by love. He interprets them rather by a rebuke, though there was love, we believe, back of the rebuke. "If you can discern," he says, "so simply the signs of the weather, why can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Well, Lord Jesus, perhaps it is because we have come to be "fair weather Christians." "And it's always fair weather, when good fellows get together, with a stein on the table, and the good song ringing clear." And then we gently clank the steins together, like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, and that gives us our substitute for the music of the spheres! But the mischief of that "fair weather" may be that we shall have too much of it, and for too long; so much of it indeed that there may be a famine in the land—a famine such as there was once in Israel, when there was

no sweet rain of God upon the mountains, nor any dew!

But we have not touched yet the depths of Whittier's phrase; not yet the kneeling Jesus, sharing with us the silence of eternity. We know, as I have said, that silence. We know it only too well. We know the silence of eternity far better than we know the eternal Voice. Is it not our lament over unanswered prayers? Is it not "in the dead, unhappy night, when the rain is on the roof"? Is it not in whispering hopes when there is no answering whisper?

O, there may have been blessed times when God seemed to speak so plainly, and now, O bitter silence, when He does not seem to speak at all. We remember that lament of Saul, which is the very pith of Saul's tragedy, when he cried, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." We do not know what to make of such words, whether to pity Saul for the sheer terror of them, or to blame him, in that, when he could no longer hear God, he plunged into superstition, and rode through a dark, dark night to the cave of the witch of Endor. Pity or blame ourselves we must, for it will happen to us all that God will seem to answer us no more.

It was so with Blessed Jeanne d'Arc, whose orchard at Domremy was as vocal with Voices as it was redolent of bloom. But it was not so when Blessed Jeanne came to her trial at Rouen, and she heard her Voices no more. Why did not Eternity speak to Blessed Jeanne then, and she, poor Maid, so near to it? Why does not

Eternity speak to us, poor common mortals, in our little tragic askings? Why does not conscience speak to us, as once perhaps it did; for this may be the eternal silence, too? Paul Laurence Dunbar said that conscience could not speak, because remorse came and sat in its place, and said, "I will say now what remains to be said."

Yes; the question we pose now is this: Why must remorse be so vocal and God so silent? Let us take two tragic incidents from great literature. Let us take that incident in Robert Browning's "Pippa Passes"—the incident in which Ottima and Sebald make their guilty love in the shrub-house of Ottima's aged husband's garden, and the murdered husband lies even then in the great house near by, murdered by Sebald that they might be more free in their love. In all literature you will not find a more guilty scene than that. But remorse is there, and so heavy does it sit upon Sebald that Ottima must enlist all her barbaric beauty to conjure her lover from that black mood. And this is the point: in this business God does not seem to say one word! Rather would it seem—as Ottima argues—that God does not care! She reminds him of how they lay once in a thick wood, when they had to hide from old Luca's jealousy, for he was then alive; and there came a thunderstorm, and lightning smote through the trees, as if it were God's naked sword, "plunged and replunged through the close wood-screen, feeling for guilty thee and me! But it did not find us, my Sebald! Kiss my shoulder again, and call me your Magnificent in sin!" And Sebald is again thrall to her, and his lips start to frame the sentence—"Magnificent . . ." and the words

are muted upon his lips, and Pippa passes without in the morning singing that "God is in his heaven," and that this is a righteous world! At that little silk-winder's voice, making God's Voice audible in the eternal silence, Robert Browning believes the redemption of Ottima and Sebald may have begun, to be finished perhaps in some other "country" far beyond Italy.

Again, there is that incident in *Macbeth*—that incident in the dark wee hours in Inverness Castle, after Macbeth has done the murder. It is when Lady Macbeth has taken the bloody dagger from her husband, and he is looking at his hands. It is their secret safe behind those thick castle walls. Who is to accuse them; who is to reproach them? Again, God has not said one word! Not once; not when Macbeth crept to that deed, his wife prompting him; not when he "crept up those stairs past the snoring grooms"; not when he stood at Duncan's door, and opened it, and entered—not once has the Eternal Silence spoken! But does not God speak? Quiller-Couch thinks that this is one of the supreme moments in Shakespeare, though there is no word spoken. There is a knock on the thick door. "Who knocks!" whisper the guilty pair. Well we have read *Macbeth*, and we know that it is Macduff and Lennox who knock. And they are on the most peaceful errand in the world, though honest folk are in bed.

Do we suppose that Shakespeare means *their* knocking, though it is indeed their hands that knock? Is it their unsuspecting, earthly hands that knock in that weird hour on the door of Inverness Castle? Does Shakespeare mean that? As Quiller-Couch says, "Who cares

a farthing for Macduff? Who cares less than half a farthing for Lennox?" "Who knocks?" Well, Shakespeare will have us believe that it is God! It is God breaking the eternal silence! It is the Moral Order of the Universe vindicating Itself! It is, whatever be our religion, that which holds humankind together by the laws of sanity and righteousness! It is that world beyond the thick walls of Inverness Castle, or beyond our world of crime and treachery, which seems at times to make such a safe theatre for the foulest deeds. But it is speaking now. It is revealing now the things as they are, and that to all eternity Evil must be different from Good!

Perhaps we have dwelt too much upon these monstrous hyperboles, striking so strangely, it may seem, upon our own petty sins and crimes. But I wanted to show you how this problem of the eternal silence strikes two overtowering geniuses in English Letters. We view enough tragedies in the morning newspaper, God knows; though they may be crimes fitter for a police reporter than the pages of Shakespeare and Browning. But reading even these, we must ask our questions. Why does not God say or do something? Is it because He does not care? Or does He not speak, as these great tragic writings affirm? At the moment, or in the long last, is Eternity silent as to what takes place in Time?

But Whittier would bring us back to the kneeling Christ and to a better time. When Whittier wrote of how Jesus kneels to share with us the silence of eternity interpreted by love, he must have been thinking of that incident in which the disciples were greatly troubled,

and Jesus was wrapped in the Father's peace. Surely it was that morning, when in panic they were seeking Him, when they had lost Him over night. They had risen from their unsleeping beds to climb at last the hill where He might, or might not be. And when they came upon Him on that morning hill top, all their fear and all their reproach with which they would have reproached Him fell away.

He was praying, and His prayer made such a path of light from His upturned face to the heavens, that they could utter but one cry: "Teach us to pray!" And we have what we call the "Lord's Prayer." That is the silence of eternity interpreted by love! For what does that prayer say of the eternal silence? It says that Fatherhood—not "Fatherland"—is over all. It is God's Name hallowed among His children. It is His Kingdom coming, though it may seem to come so slowly. It is His will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven, for it is one will. It is bread for today, bread eaten in unselfishness, and in trust that tomorrow's bread will not fail us. It is that we may be forgiven our sins, having first made that forgiveness possible by forgiving others. It is that we may not be led into temptation so deep and so grievous that we may not be delivered from the evil. That is the silence of eternity interpreted by that simple, but profound prayer. And that is why Christians, almost universally, have used that prayer, "by intention," we say, when words have not come readily to their own lips.

How often Jesus must have knelt to share with us the silence of eternity, and we have no record of it! Not

always did He pray in the light of morning. It has been said that He was not a good sleeper. The midnights knew Him; He walked and prayed in the wee hours before the dawn. A candle held against the windy dark of some olive wood, or down by the flowing river, might have revealed that kneeling Figure of the praying Christ. And His prayers, He answered, going out wordlessly to do the Will. In the greatest prophecy of Him, it was said that when He should come, He would not lift up His voice, nor cry in the streets; and this merciful word is added, that He would be as merciful as He was silent. The bruised reed would He not break, nor quench the smoking flax.

Did He read again that prophecy, as a man I used to know has suggested, read it again and again in His solitary hours? Did He kneel to pray in the morning and there, where He knelt, see a bit of smoking flax left from some fisherman's fire, and gently stir it with His sandalled foot until it flamed again? So a million, million times has He kindled the cold hearts of men. Did He kneel to pray by the river, and there see some bruised reed, crushed to the earth by the lumbering feet of some great beast, seeking its drink or its prey? And did He lift up that bruised stem, that it might stand straight again, that it might have its chance to live?

So a million, million times has He demonstrated that He would put down the mighty from their seats and exalt the humble and meek. It is not His loud crying in the streets against our tumults and our shoutings that we are to know His witness. And we shall all know the silence of eternity. The question is, how shall that silence

be interpreted? Shall we interpret it as if He had never come to us—come to us as human as ourselves, and yet as Very God? Shall we let Him share with us that silence?

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus kneels to share with *me*
The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love.

IV

THE BEAUTY OF HIS PEACE

IN THAT great Benediction of St. Paul in Philippians our hearts and minds are given into the keeping of "the Peace of God which passeth understanding." Perhaps it is because God's Peace does pass understanding that Whittier, in the fourth stanza of his hymn, half retreats into poetic metaphor, half stands out in prosaic fact. Here is the stanza:

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.

Take that first petition: "Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease." That is metaphor, and yet it was something more than metaphor in "the land of little rain" in which our Bible was written. There was rain enough indeed in the winter months, but from May through October there was scarcely any rain at all. If it had not been that God sent His dew upon Israel during

those long, hot months, man and beast would have died of thirst, and all grass would have been consumed as in a furnace.

As you read the Old Testament Scriptures you will find strong cries sent up to God that He may drop the dews of His quietness upon the striving and panting earth. As you read those Scriptures you can scarcely tell whether the writer is describing the dew or the rain; for they meant the same thing; they meant life. You will not expect those Scriptural writers to write as scientifically of the dew as your modern meteorologist would. They could not explain the processes by which dew is condensed from the atmosphere at land level. Those writers said that God dropped down his dew from heaven; for they were children crying to a merciful heaven for food for themselves and for their cattle in valley and on the hill. Often those dews, gathering in the darkness of the night, would blanket the morning earth with an almost impenetrable mist. Read George Adams Smith's great *Geography of the Holy Land* and you will detect a kind of homesickness in him for his own mist-shrouded Scotland.

But we cannot stop to consider all that metaphorical poetry of petition for the still dews of quietness, all that metaphorical poetry of thanksgiving when the gracious dew ended the strain and stress, and the prayer passed into the music of grateful praise. But what happens when the strain and stress of our day rob us of that Peace and Trust in God of which these old Scriptures witness? Or when life is disordered by wilfulness and waywardness? In *Rivers to the Sea*, Sara Teasdale tells

her story, perhaps tells something of the story of every one of us:

I came from the sunny valleys
And sought for the open sea,
For I thought in its gray expanses
My peace would come to me.

I came at last to the ocean
And found it wild and black,
And I cried to the windless valleys,
"Be kind and take me back!"

But the thirsty tide ran inland,
And the salt waves drank of me,
And I who was fresh as the rainfall
Am bitter as the sea.¹

I said that Sara Teasdale may have told something of our own lives in that poignant little poem. Is it not so? Has not the once sweet river of our own innocence known something of the bitter brine into which it has gravitated, perhaps because of its chosen channel, perhaps because circumstances we would not, or could not control, grooved its path? However this may be, the sweet waters are bitter and the brine of them is in our tears. Can all God's gracious dew restore that sweetness and peace? But God matches that river with a river in the Holy Land which is His own parable of Grace.

One of those Old Testament writers speaks of the snow upon Hermon as being the dew of God. And so it was—the dew condensed from clouds moving over those Judean Hills—the frozen dew of Hermon, the snow of

¹P. 105 of *Rivers to the Sea*, The Macmillan Company.

the Lebanon range. Now hear the parable, which is more than parable, which is Nature's way, and therefore God's way, for cleansing that which is not fit. The Jordan is not unlike that "river" of the poet's life, of our life. The river Jordan rises in the pure snows of Hermon, and thence pursues its tortuous way down the defile through the one hundred and eighty miles of the Holy Land. Then it loses itself in the brine of the Dead Sea. Might not the Jordan, if it could speak, utter the poet's own lament—"I who was fresh as the rainfall am bitter as the sea"? Yes; but something happens! As an historian has written, "The tropical sun broods above that Sea called Dead, above the bitterness of the Jordan's fate; a sun that ever draws up an invisible mist from the basin of brine, draws it up until it forms a cloud, and a prevailing wind wafts it northward, retracing the length of Palestine that marked the Jordan's downward path. On the heights of Hermon that cloud is distilled into that snowy dew that Spring shall melt and send rippling down to the river's channel, and the Jordan shall fill its banks once more with treasure recovered from the Dead Sea."²

It is, as I have said, Nature's parable of the cleansing of that which is not fit. But surely, it is more than that. It is God's way of saying that what we breathe to Him with the salt of our tears, shall answer us brimful with His returning Peace. I know your hearts will acquiesce in this experience of the lifting and cleansing power of God's Redeeming Grace, though how it came, or when,

²See Thomas R. Slicer, *The Great Affirmations of Religion*, pp. 147-48, of which the above is a paraphrase.

or why, you could not, or would not say. Whittier is right: the dews of this deliverance are the dews of quietness; but when our lives are again ordered by them, we can confess the Beauty of that Peace.

But I want to turn now to a more practical side of this beautiful Peace. You know that when a peace is declared an envoy with plenipotentiary powers is sent to announce it. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the Heavenly King's Envoy to our earth. Again, we cannot stay to enumerate the many instances in which He offered to our world the beautiful boon of Peace. But we may consider one, and that perhaps the most revealing of all. In that instance Jesus told us not only that we should have Peace, but what to do with it. He said, as St. Luke reports Him, that when we enter a house—it may be the house of a friend or an enemy, or it may be a nation approaching, as it must approach in this inevitable intermingling of a world suddenly grown a neighborhood, another nation's house of its imperial government—when we enter that house, we shall first say, Peace be to this house. And if the Son of Peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, your peace shall return to you again.

Do you see not only the beauty, but the tremendous psychology of that Peace of Jesus? You are to proffer Peace to all peoples, to all mankind. But all may not accept that Peace. If any house will not accept it, then you are not to leave your peace in that house. In other words, if that house, that individual, that nation will not have your peace, you must not let the angry mood of that house, that individual, that nation invest your

mood with its mood of anger. You must not take away less than you brought. Your peace must return to you. And it must do so for the reason that it takes two to make a quarrel. Robert Browning's *Saul* is the story of how young David invested the dark mood of the Israelitish King with his peace. It is a great poem for any man to read. But somewhere Studdert Kennedy has suggested three beings who might not thank you, or at least might not appreciate a gift copy of Browning's great poem. He thinks that a too prosaic businessman might not appreciate it, he might use it to prop up the short leg of a table. Or a boy might use it as a base for his toy engine. But to toss it into the cage of a gorilla would be the worst use of all. For the gorilla would certainly tear it into silly shreds.

The beautiful Peace of Jesus has reference to the troubled nations of our times. I shrink instinctively from writing about world politics or discussing them from the pulpit, especially when they have to do with individual personalities. Because of my limitations, my reticence is for this further reason, not that the preacher may not properly speak of politics in the pulpit, as the phrase runs, for the Constitution itself guarantees him that right; but the pulpit has a far more important errand than that. The Christ Whom we preach refused to discuss with two angry brothers the exact status of a line fence on the piece of pasture land which had been bequeathed them. Jesus said, "Who made me a divider over you?" What He said, in effect, was this. Be imbued with my spirit and you will have no difficulty with your respective frontiers. In other words, His *Will* is our

Peace. We are to preach His Spirit, and manifestly we cannot do that if we use our time in rehashing the political and economic debates in which our hearers wade up to their chins every day of the week-day world.

But today I must name a name heard everywhere in our world. By this dictum of Jesus it seems impossible, does it not, to invest Herr Hitler with the world's peace? Witness the Munich Pact. It was a peace, thought by many to be stained with cowardice and dishonor. I do not think I share that view, not wholly. I think Jesus, shuddering at the implications of another world slaughter, might have said: "Yes; take that Munich Pact to Herr Hitler's house, and say, 'Peace be to this House, and inasmuch as may be to the world.'" But here is the amazing penetration of Jesus. He knew that there would be those who would be unworthy of that peace; and you and I know that Herr Hitler is such an one. We know it because the ink was not yet dry upon the signature of Herr Hitler on that Pact, when he tore it into fragments and flung it into the faces of the powers that had signed it with him. I mean that on November 10, 1938, Hitler, with a ferocious racial hatred scarcely equalled in the annals of blood hatred and blood pride, perpetrated an outrage against human freedom that threatened world peace more than ten thousand airships armed in proof.

Let not Herr Hitler be offended when we say this. It is what he himself has said, and continues to say. And it is of such that Jesus, who cannot be imprisoned as Martin Niemoeller is, speaks this amazingly true

word. There will be a house that will not accept your peace. You must not, because you cannot, leave your peace there. But above all, you must not let the dictator's anger pass upon you in exchange for your peace.

Has Jesus no other word to speak of the man who will not have peace? He has many words to say, and one of them is this: He says that if Satan's kingdom be divided, it cannot stand. Whether this particular kingdom of which we are thinking is a divided kingdom or not, I cannot say. But I do know that the way of the Dictator's throughout history has become a divided way and has led to a fall. Soon or late the Dictator's madness divides his kingdom against himself. It is like that story of the serpent around which some cattlemen in Arizona made a ring of straw and set the straw on fire. Within the ring the serpent darted every which-way seeking escape, and, finding none finally struck itself and died. Jesus said the divided kingdom cannot stand. Jesus said that he who takes the sword shall perish by the sword. History has verified the saying.

Yes; but did not Jesus say on one occasion that he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one? He did say it, and pacifists have been trying to explain it ever since, and to explain it away. But you cannot explain it away, its meaning is surely very plain. And the last thing it means is that Jesus was rattling a sword when He said it. When Jesus tells us that satanic things will destroy themselves of their own poison, He does not mean that they shall destroy us while all good men are waiting for them to die. Nor

are we to sell our garments and buy swords to hasten their death. But might it not be wisdom to have a sword to guard our own house, while we are waiting in the terrible patience of Jesus Christ? This is the warrant for reasonable armament, if there be one, for police defense, for national defense. This is anything but war talk; this is peace talk, Jesus Himself prompting.

The Beauty of thy Peace. Yes; but alas! will we have the Beauty of *His* Peace? His preachers have been scored because they have preached war, because they have blessed war. But when has He been consulted when war was over? I read recently the speeches of six Christian statesmen, representing six Christian nations. Believe it or not the Name of the Prince of Peace was not mentioned once. It was as if He had never lived, as if He had never died. When was He ever invited to sit at any Treaty Table of the nations? It is true that the poet, Heine, once had a vision of the gods holding banquet on high Olympus. To that feast came a wan Figure bearing a Cross which He laid down amongst the flowers, whereupon every god slunk shamefacedly away. But that must have been mythology. It has never been so with us mortals. We say it is either Christ or chaos. But when is He to have His chance?

I shrank from localizing with a name, this Beautiful and Eternal Peace of God. But it must not be allowed that His Voice is not the logical Voice in the matters that burden today's newspaper. We shall have World Peace when we allow the mind that was in Christ Jesus to dictate its terms; we shall have World Peace when it is allowed to rest upon His shoulders. We shall not have

individual peace until His Peace rests upon us. But let us pray for His Peace in our own souls:

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.

V

THE STILL SMALL VOICE
OF CALM

WE HAVE come to consider the last stanza of Whittier's great hymn:

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire.
O still, small voice of calm.

Without intending to do so, Whittier has given us in this stanza the last word that geological science has to say of the formation of our planet. When geology was a guess, and not a science, it was supposed that the great mountains and deep chasms of the earth were the result of catastrophic upheavals. Such upheavals there were, but they were brief in duration and effect compared to the unbelievable millenniums of erosion of water and wind and frost. In other words it has been God, if you will, *breathing*, as Whittier says, upon the heats of these planetary desires—it has been this, rather than earthquake, tornado, and flame that has fashioned earth's physical structure.

In other words, it was the age-long accumulation of mica flakes that built up the mighty bastions of the

Alps. It was the coral insects that reared whole leagues of the American Continent, and lifted innumerable isles in the Pacific. It was the slow silting up of rivers that created the sites of great cities, and it took millions of tiny, almost microscopic, creatures to produce one inch of the white cliffs of Dover.

What has all this to do with the breath of God upon your soul and mine? It has this to do, at least, that it furnishes us with a parable. Take, for example, those white cliffs of Dover built, as we have said, of tiny, obscure, unknown, unregarded workers. Matthew Arnold, standing on Dover Beach, beneath those towering chalk cliffs, said that the sea of his faith had ebbed as the sea had ebbed from Dover Beach, and that he heard only now:

. . . its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

But had Matthew Arnold *really* lost his faith there on Dover Beach? Before we say so, let us listen to just one more word he has to say in that same poem. That word is this which he addresses to his companion, to every companion, in matters of faith:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain . . .

We agree with Matthew Arnold that the world—that part of it, for example, that is represented in the chalk cliffs behind him—has no peace for him, nor help for pain. But we submit that the chalk cliff has a message for Matthew Arnold, and it is this. If he and that other are true to themselves, and, as a natural consequence, true to every other, and true to God, they will build the high mountain of a noble humanity. For thus noble humanity has been built, in so far as it has been built, by that breath of truth upon the soul, rather than by catastrophic conversions. This is the greatness of Whittier's prayer, namely: that the healing balm of God may breathe through the heats of our little desires before they become devastating flames; that the still, small voice of calm may make unnecessary the earthquake's roar. So Stevenson thought that his "Celestial Surgeon" might have cruelly to stab his spirit broad awake, but it would be only after—a long time after—the happy beams of human eyes and the glory of summer dawns and the gentle ministry of books had knocked on his sullen heart in vain.

I suppose in speaking of "the heats of our desire" one hardly can avoid speaking of that which is perhaps our greatest heat of desire—the imperious desire of sex. Jesus was strangely silent on the topic which so obsesses our times. When Jesus did speak of sex it was mainly in connection with the integrity of the marriage vow. Even then His most solemn warning was that the sexual offense is always committed in the mind before it is consummated in the act. Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou

shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." It is that saying of Jesus, says the distinguished Master of Balliol College, Doctor Lindsay, that the Church must consider in reference to the whole matter of divorce; and it is precisely that saying of Jesus that the Church never has dared to consider in reference to that matter. Space forbids a fuller discussion of it here, and it is quoted only to show how nearly the mind of this tremendous hymn is in agreement with the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Jesus invokes our minds to give no hospitality to the impure thought; Whittier invokes the clean winds of God to cool the heat of desire before it bursts into devastating flame.

Consider further how other "heats" might be cooled by this breath of balm before they issued in the earthquake, wind, or fire. Here is the bitter struggle between capital and labor. I was told by a distinguished clergyman how he was once asked to sit at the arbitration table in a serious strike in a major industry. Before the arbitrators, sat a line of employers faced by a line of employees. Angry spokesmen shouted at one another from their respective sides, their respective colleagues glaring at one another in sullen hostility. At length this clerical member of the arbitration board asked the leader of the employers if he had ever met the leader of the employees. The employers' leader said very shortly that he had not. "Then," said the cleric, "I suggest that we take a few moments of recess to get acquainted man to man." Whereupon he proceeded to

introduce the two leaders, which introduction they acknowledged a little awkwardly by shaking hands. The clerical arbitrator then suggested that there be such making of acquaintance all down the line. This was done and soon the employers and employees were conversing with one another on friendly terms.

Thus was settled a serious strike in one of the great industries of America. In this particular instance it was the employer who yielded, and he yielded because it became apparent to him, not through the threat of a labor union, but through a few moments of human converse, that he could not afford to deprive a fellow-man's children of privileges that, had he been in the same circumstances, he would have coveted earnestly for his own. Here the breath of a common Father breathed its balm across the little heats of two of God's sons and the possible earthquake that might have involved thousands was averted.

On the side of the labor union that heat of desire might be cooled also if the angry mood might be checked by sober thought. Probably very few labor agitators, excepting always the paid agitator, consider at the outset what tragic consequences may follow the destruction or the hindrance of certain utilities upon which humanity may be depending for its very life.

I read recently of a true and poignant incident which illustrates in a tragic way what I mean. One morning an electrician in Paris kissed his wife and little daughter good-by and went to his work. The day passed and night came down upon his home. At ten o'clock that night the electrician's little daughter was seized by a

severe illness, and the doctor, frantically summoned by the mother, saw that an immediate operation was imperative. The child could not even be moved to a hospital. An operating table was hastily improvised, and the surgeon set to work. At that critical moment the electric lights went out, leaving the surgeon in darkness against which no amount of skill could possibly cope. The distracted mother groped in the darkness for a lantern, but when she had lighted it and brought it to the side of the little sufferer it was too late. The child was dead. It was at that moment that the electrician burst into the room crying, "Hurrah, we are on a strike. There is not a light burning in Paris!"

Breathe through the heats of our desire
 Thy coolness and thy balm;
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire.
 O still, small voice of calm.

Or, there is the heat of desire, that if sufficiently fanned, may make the wastrel and the drunkard. Lovable Rip Van Winkle, in the Catskills, is not first of all a drunkard. The little heat of desire is in him, and he knows that it may become a flame. So he says again and again as he takes a drink, "I will not count this time." But he says it too many times, and William James of Harvard says: "Rip Van Winkle may not have counted, but the cells in his body counted every drink." And soon those fiery, thirsty, screaming, alcoholic cells in Rip's body are in a hopeless majority against him, and they shout against Rip's weakened

will, and they shout him down, and poor Rip sleeps in a drunken stupor in the Catskills' haze.

What was Rip's tragedy after all? It was not, as my friend Bishop Quayle used to say, that Rip was a drunkard, though that was tragedy enough. It was not that his wife was a scold, nor that his children were ragged and in hunger, though that too was tragedy enough. But the real tragedy of Rip Van Winkle was that he lived in the time of George Washington; nay, that he lived what time his country was fighting desperately for its liberties, and Rip Van Winkle slept his drunken sleep with a loaded gun beside him and never fired a shot! "Take heed to thyself," said an ancient scriptural warning to God's people as they entered a land thick with deserted pagan altars—"Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place thou seest." It means, does it not, that that which is good may be made common, and that which is common may become evil? It means, does it not, that the heat of a little desire, breathed upon by the breath of restraint, may not be tragic at all?

If we have not been tricked by "the fish story" in the Book of Jonah, we know that Book to be amongst the most tender of all the Scriptures. It is God's merciful Gospel, as Doctor John Hutton insists, and surpassed in its mercy only by those portions of the Gospels which have to do with the very Passion of Christ. Yet Jonah who professes to be God's preacher is so hot in his fanatical desire that he dooms the great city of Nineveh to destruction for its wickedness. But God could not take it. God had to let His preacher down, and that,

for the preacher, is hard to take also. Nevertheless, God could not destroy Nineveh.

“Why, think,” said God to Jonah, “think, man, there are one hundred and twenty thousands of people in Nineveh that do not know their right hand from their left. You can’t destroy people in a wholesale way like that! And besides, there is much cattle in Nineveh, Jonah! We must think even of those poor beasts in the stockyards.” It was like God to say that—God who marks even the sparrow’s fall! And that which in Jonah may have been first a little heat was fanned in him into a very fire of rebellion. It was a long time before that hot rebellion, if you remember the story, that Jonah’s heat should have known the breath of God’s Redeeming Grace. For, allegorically at least, it was Jonah’s disobedience to God’s still, small Voice that caused the tempest around the ship, bound for Tarshish, and which in turn caused the superstitious sailors to cast Jonah into the sea.

The point is that we should not blame God for the wind of Jonah’s adversity. It was a good wind, on the whole, as all of God’s winds are. It was an ill wind only for one who fought against God. That wind, blowing landward from the Great Sea, having lashed the ship to Jonah’s discomfiture, went on its way across the country, dying down after a while to a safe speed. It brought health and refreshing to the land. It entered into the windows of the sick in crowded Nineveh, and pale faces turned gratefully to meet it. Nurses had prayed for a breath of air. It came cool from the sea and the sleep of the city toilers was sweeter because

of it. Even the cattle of Nineveh were grateful for the breeze, and down in the harbor the ships were able to lift their anchors and shake out their sails. It was an ill wind for a man who flew in the face of it, but it was a good wind generally, as all winds are. I know that it is easy to say that the breath of God should have saved Jonah when it was a breath and not a tempest.

It is easy to say, and it is of course true to say, that Jonah would never have known the tempest if he had listened to the breath. Yes; it is easy for us to say that of poor Jonah in the long ago. But is it easy to say it to ourselves? Is it easy for us to offer our little heats, while they *are* little heats, to that cooling balm? Is it easy for us, even when we see moral earthquake and wind and fire all about us—is it easy for us to hear God's still, small Voice of calm? We know that it is not easy. Therefore, we have need to pray, the lines of this great hymn helping us:

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire.
O still, small voice of calm.

PART TWO

*

WHERE HIS FLOCK RESTS AT NOON

I

NOON OVER THE LILIES

II

NOON OVER CARMEL

III

NOON OVER SYCHAR

IV

NOON OVER DAMASCUS

V

NOON OVER CALVARY

"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth,
where thou feedest, where thou makest
thy flock to rest at noon . . . ?"

—The Song of Solomon

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited;

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
"Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?"
"Bravely!" said he; "for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread*."

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam,
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

—MATTHEW ARNOLD, *East London*.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast or back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed—fight on, for ever,
There as here!"

—ROBERT BROWNING, *Epilogue*

I

NOON OVER THE LILIES

IN THESE pages on the topic: "Where His Flock Rests at Noon," there is temptation to employ a good deal of what we call allegory. But if that is a sin, it is a Biblical sin; so you are not to sit in the seats of the scornful. Indeed we should not have had this phrase—"Where His Flock Rests at Noon"—if it had not been for allegory's artful aid. The phrase is from *The Song of Solomon*, a book which we should certainly not have had in the Holy Scriptures at all, had not the puritan divines been suffered to allegorize it. It is a lovely dark maiden in that oriental poem who asks so wistfully: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" And the next chapter tells the maiden that her shepherd lover feeds His flock among the lilies.

Now it is passing strange that to the puritan divines the noon is real, and the flock is real, and the lilies are real, but the lover lad and the lover lass must not be real. They must be allegory, the allegory being that the lover is the Christ and the beloved is the Church.

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Well, if only by being so they could get into the Bible, I am heartily glad they got in. But it is my private opinion that they are lover and beloved, both in the Bible and out of it. For I insist that clean human love is the divinest thing in the universe, save only God! I insist, with Robert Browning, that the answer to the question which philosophers have asked from time immemorial is the answer of the breath and the bloom of a year in the bag of one honeybee; that all the chemistry of nature is in one flashing diamond; that all the wonder of the sea is in one pearl; that all the deep heart's core is in the kiss of one girl; and, calling another witness, namely, Tolstoi, that where love is, God is!

Allegorically, then, or otherwise, let us think of Noon Over the Lilies. Noon at least is not allegory. Noon by every man's clock is the hardest hour of the day. It is the garish hour, the hour when the sun beats down most pitilessly upon our heads. It is the hour when the laborer has toiled long, and yet it is a long time until release and rest and sleep. Some one has asked which is the hardest stage of a journey; is it when we start out, or when we are midway, or when we near the end? It is not when we set out, for then we have the freshness and strength of the morning. It is not when we near the end, for then we have the cheering lights of home. The hardest stage of a journey is its middle stage, when we have journeyed long and journey's end is far away. This is the deep meaning in the Ninety-first Psalm, of "the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

That young poet, Rupert Brooke, who had to go home before it was noon, said somewhere that "God

hath matched us with His hour." How often does God match our hot, feverish noons with His own noons in these Scriptures, so that almost at random we have these topics: "Noon Over the Lilies," "Noon Over Carmel," "Noon Over Sychar," "Noon Over Damascus," and "Noon Over Calvary."

Let us assume, then, that our minds do respond to this figure of the noonday; that our hearts are weary and perplexed and feverish and troubled. If our hearts ask their feverish questions, shall they be given nothing but lilies? Yes; if so be that the grace of Jesus helps us to offer the lilies as He offered them—it will be enough! Was there ever a more utterly weary crowd, in a more utterly weary noonday of life, than that crowd to which our Lord did offer the beauty of the lilies? Of course He had first to see the beauty of the lilies Himself. I suspect the sheep saw the lilies that morning before He did. They did not wholly scorn the patch of bloom, for the lilies of Galilee were edible to sheep. But the sheep moved over them to the lush grass which they liked better. The farmer who next came over the hill made no secret of his scorn of the lilies. If indeed he did not curse them, he thought they spoiled his pasture. But the Son of God glorified them until this hour! "Consider them," He said, "how they *grow*!" They have life, and they have it not by anxiety; they have it because of God's gift to them. What perplexed Tennyson in the flower in the crannied wall, did not perplex Jesus in the flowers in a Galilean pasture. He knew what was in God and what was in man. He knew that God is "the first Author of Beauty." He knew

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that man cannot live by bread alone. But He knew that even bitter bread may be sweetened by the beautiful Word of God.

The sermon of the lilies, however, must appeal to the heart rather than to the head. If to us, unlike to Wordsworth, the meanest flower that blows cannot give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears, no amount of pleading can release those relieving fountains. Here an ounce of illustration may be worth a ton of argument. In the biography of Alice Freeman Palmer, a former president of Wellesley College, and one of the richest lives that has blessed American womanhood, there is an incident of the ministry of beauty that carries us back to those Galilean days. Doctor Palmer, in that revealing biography of his wife, tells us that she once taught a class of little girls in the slums of Boston. One steaming hot day in July, Mrs. Palmer asked the class in that tenement room what she should talk to them about that morning. One little girl lifted her eyes heavy with pain and said: "Please tell us how to be happy." Mrs. Palmer felt the tears rushing to her eyes and a lump coming into her throat. How should she tell that child how to be happy, that child who had to care not only for herself, but for the baby brother which even then she held in her thin arms? But Mrs. Palmer did manage to say: "Well, you might try this, and perhaps you may find happiness. You must look for something pretty every day; and don't skip a day, or it won't work. Look for a leaf, a flower, a cloud; for anything that is pretty, and when you find it, stop before it long enough to say, 'Isn't it beautiful!' Do you

think you can do that?" And every little girl promised she would try.

A week later, when Mrs. Palmer was walking through that slum, she felt some one tugging at her arm. It was the little girl who had pleaded, "Please, tell us how to be happy!" "I found it," she cried; "I found it; but it was very hard." "Found what, dear?" "I found the pretty thing. I never skipped a day, but it was awful hard. One day it was raining, and I could not go to look at the grass and trees in the park. I was afraid I was going to miss that day, for there is nothing pretty where we live. I was standing by the window, 'most cryin', and then I saw. I saw a sparrow taking a bath in the gutter, and when he flirited the drops from his wings, they were just like diamonds; and then I saw something else that was pretty, too. The sun came through a cloud and it shined on baby brother's hair, and it was just like it was gold, and I know now that I can find something pretty every day, if I just look for it. . . ." Is it too hard for us, Friends; placed more favorably in life than that little slum child; is it too hard for us to find something beautiful, and never to skip a day? Not an old saying, but a new commandment I give unto you: "Consider the lilies"—where He makes His flock to rest at noon! For, believe me, there may be more of life's deep logic in a lily struggling up through this trodden, anxious earth than in whole libraries of books!

But to find the logic of the lilies is not enough. We must press that logic home as Jesus did. "If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and to-

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morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?" There is God's providence, then, implied in the lilies, as well as His beauty. How long has He been clothing man with His providence! There is a passage in Job, which Dean Sperry of Harvard says is unequalled in literature for its studied inhumanity. It is that passage in which God is answering Job out of the whirlwind of His providential acts. There He tells Job, among other things, that He "causes it to rain on the earth, *where no man is*; on the wilderness, *wherein there is no man*; to satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth!" The implication of that is that God does care for the grass, just for the grass. But that "studied inhumanity" is "studied" surely for the same reason that prompted Jesus to say, "How much more will God clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

A scientist has told us that half a million years ago a barefooted man, or at least a creature who had feet like a man, went walking one rainy morning in Pennsylvania. This is rather hard on Bishop Ussher who wrote in the margin of our Bibles that the world was created six thousand years ago, and finished at six o'clock on Saturday night! But the scientist is more sure of his facts than Bishop Ussher was of his dates. The scientist's slab upon which was imprinted the man's feet lay at the bottom of a mine shaft, and it was a simple matter to arrive at the half million years by adding up the strata. But the most beautiful thing about the slab was that it was pitted with rain drops. It meant that even in that far-off morning of the world, God

was organizing the weather. Out of that horror of mist and fire that must have clothed this earth at the first, God was getting things ready to do business for the barefooted man. I hope the barefooted man meditated that mercy as he walked under that sweet rain in Pennsylvania half a million years ago. I hope that we may put ourselves to the same school as that primitive child of God; for the same lesson is on the blackboard now that was there then; and it is this: "Consider the lilies . . . if God so clothe the grass of the field . . . how much more you!"

And while it is noon over the lilies, there is one other lesson to be learned. It is an important lesson, if "What must I do to be saved?" is an important question. How can the lilies save us? They can teach us God's beauty; they can teach us God's providence; but how can they save us? If you will pardon a personal incident, I remember having asked that question in a London lodging one day just after the War. I was going the next day, in fear and trembling, to preach at Oxford. I was writing a sermon on "Consider the lilies." I had progressed as far as the beauty of the lilies and their evident preaching of God's providential care. But I said, this will not do. England needs strength today in her sanctuaries as well as beauty. I had never seen in any commentary or any sermon that the lilies could *do* anything. In my perplexity I looked again and again across the room at some books that I had bought. I could identify them all, except one little green book. Whose book was that? Why had I bought it? Much as I wanted to get on with my sermon and find some-

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thing that the lilies could do, I had at last to cross the room and satisfy my curiosity. It was an early book of Doctor Robert Horton, long since out of print. I opened the book at random and my eyes fell upon a story of a stag hunt in France. The hounds had pursued the poor stag to the river and to an island, where for a moment the hunted stag stood off the first dogs. Then, plunging again into the stream, the stag swam to the farther bank, broke through the underbrush and emerged into acres of lily-blooms! In vain in that fragrance the hounds tried to follow the scent of the stag. Finally they went baffled away. So there was salvation in the lilies! So there was sanctuary, safety, haleness, a holiness in beauty as well as a beauty of holiness!

Long ago Julia Ward Howe wrote at the end of her "Battle Hymn":

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born, across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free!
While God is marching on.

It is a different battle hymn that summons us under the hot and feverish and troubled noon of this day. It calls us not to die, but to *live*, that we, and all men, may be both holy and free. Holy in the true sense of that much abused word—that they be hale. Hale because there can be no health of the human soul without beauty, surrounded as every human soul is with so much that is vulgar and ugly. Hale because we, unlike the clothed grass of the field, have more than today

and tomorrow. And free because there is sanctuary as well as beauty in the Beauty of our God. If our souls ask where He makes His flock to rest at noon, the answer is: "He feedeth His flock among the lilies."

II

NOON OVER CARMEL

IN STRANGE circumstance we find God's flock today. Is it God's flock, I wonder? Will even the immense tolerance of the One Hundredth Psalm cover these "black sheep" upon the mountain? "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." But that is said of a people who are "sure that the Lord he is God." And these people have said they are sure that Baal he is God! Once they were God's sheep; but they are far-wandered now. Something, or some one, has bewitched them. And they know it. There is thunder on this noon!

One other thing is certain. The sheep on Mount Carmel are hungry. For three years there has been no rain in the land. I cannot say and I will not say the why of that famine. I cannot forget that Jesus said, "He sendeth his rain upon the just and upon the unjust." But the black sheep of Carmel did not know that, and Baal did not help them to believe it. The Lord was not their shepherd, therefore they did *want!*

This is one of the instances in which, as the cynical French saying has it, we must look for the woman. It

was the beautiful Phœnician princess, married to the young Hebrew king, who had bewitched God's flock. It had started out so romantically, that international marriage between Israel and Tyre. Scholars think, and not without internal evidence, that the Forty-fifth Psalm was composed for the nuptials of Ahab and Jezebel. "And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift . . . all thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. . . . Hearken, O daughter of Tyre, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house."

It was a lovely nuptial song; but that was precisely what Princess Jezebel did not do. She did not forget her father's house, nor his Baal worship with its utter religion of the senses. Up went Baal's altars on every high place in Israel; from Phœnicia came Baal's priests, while the altars of Israel's God were thrown down. At first this foreign enchantress used her beauty and her cajolery to captivate Israel's heart. Then she used sterner measures; and finally those whom she could not abase, she slew.

Let us not linger upon the story of this murderess. The Bible, the most tolerant of all biographies, dismisses her with surely the weirdest epitaph in all history: "They shall not say this is Jezebel!" It is not only the weirdest epitaph beneath which that beautiful, proud woman keeps her fathomless sleep; it is that she is the most permanently dead person of all the sons and daughters of men! As John Donne put it in one of those sermons—sermons that contain probably the finest Eng-

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lish prose ever written—as quaint John Donne said: “The ashes of an oak in the chimney are no epitaph of that oak, to tell me how high or large that was; it tells me not what flocks it sheltered when it stood, nor what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great persons’ graves is speechless, too; it says nothing, it distinguishes nothing. As soon as the dust of a wretch whom thou wouldest not, as of a prince whom thou couldest not look upon, will trouble thine eyes if the wind blow it thither; and when a whirlwind hath blown the dust of the Churchyard into the Church, and the man sweeps out the dust of the Church into the Churchyard, who will undertake to sift those dusts again and to pronounce, This is the Patrician, this is the noble flour, and this is the yeomanly, this is the Plebeian bran? So is the death of Jezebel (Jezebel was a Queen) expressed. They shall not say, *This is Jezebel*; not only not wonder that it is, nor pity that it should be; but they shall not say, they shall not know, *This is Jezebel!*”¹

But enough of this! There is no profit in sifting ashes. Here on Mount Carmel God’s flock of strayed sheep rest at noon. I say they rest; at least they are strangely quiet. There is something beautiful in the word Carmel. It means the “Garden of God.” But the Garden of God is to be today the scene of a duel of the gods. God on one side, Baal on the other. God represented by one lone, fierce prophet, Elijah; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty! As for the people—these Baal-worshippers—they are not altogether on either side.

¹Quoted by Arthur Quiller-Couch, in *The Pocket Edition of Quiller-Couch*, p. 90.

They are mostly for Baal, but they are also a little for God. For, the Baal-worshipper, that is to say, the sensualist, is never quite all sensualist. In his idol-strewn soul there will always be one wistful altar to his early God. But this will not do for God's prophet. Under this high-noon of God, let them be one thing or another. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Still the people are silent. Is that silence consent to Baal? Very well; cry to your Baal. And they did cry: "O Baal, hear us; but there was no voice, nor any that answered." There was a test of fire; but no fire of Baal fell from the heavens. *"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, 'Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.'"*

We shall leave this battle between God and Baal to complete itself. God won the battle, and the people said so. The sweet rain fell once more upon Israel. But another rain fell before this old chapter in the First Book of Kings is closed—the red rain of reprisal, until the brook Kishon ran red with the blood of Baal's prophets. It might be said that they brought this sanguinary punishment upon themselves. There is a sensuality so utter that it dethrones reason, that it dethrones humanity, that seemed to justify a matter-of-fact newspaper woman, at the trial of such a slave to his senses, in saying over and over, and with no metaphorical meaning, "Oh, the little beast! The vile little beast!" But even so we cannot justify this bloody story. It is not

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so that we have learned God, as He is revealed in Jesus Christ.

No; the trial by fire is not enough, and the trial by blood will not do. For illustration, let me quote from a story by a genius, whom, I am afraid by many is forgotten, and whom this generation scarcely knows at all. I mean, *The Story of an African Farm*, by Olive Schreiner. This war of the prophets took powerful hold upon the imagination of Olive Schreiner, and, in an early chapter of that book, we have another noon and another prophet. Waldo, who kept the sheep, slept at night in the great four-poster bed with the stern Old Testament German. On the head of the bed hung the old German's huge watch. Every time it ticked, the old German had told Waldo, a soul went into Eternity and was lost! All through the night the watch ticked, and the lad Waldo could not sleep. "Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!" ticked the watch. How many had died since he came to bed? It must be millions! Were they all too wicked for God to save? Were they all lost? "O God," he cried, "save some."

It was noon the next day on the African veldt. The hot sun beat down upon the boy, upon the patient sheep. But it was not the hot sun that tormented the boy. He must make a test. He took his lunch which the Boer woman had put up for him—a mutton chop between two pieces of bread. He held the mutton chop in one hand and the bread in the other. He considered carefully the sacrifice he must make. Cain had brought a sacrifice of the fruits of the field; that would be the bread, surely; but the sacrifice of Cain had not been ac-

cepted. Abel had brought a sacrifice of the flocks. That surely would be the meat. He threw the bread far away into the bush and approached the place of sacrifice with the meat. He made a little altar of twelve stones—that had been the number that the old German read from the big Book. He placed the meat upon the stones. The fierce African noon beat down upon the altar, and upon the boy, who had now taken off his hat and was kneeling. "Surely," says Olive Schreiner, "since the world began there had not been so small and so ragged a priest." The boy prayed: "O God, my Father, I have made Thee a sacrifice. I have only two pence, so I cannot buy a lamb. If the lambs were mine I would give thee one; but now I have only this meat; it is my dinner-meat. Please, my Father, send fire down from heaven to burn it. Thou hast said, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou cast into the sea, nothing doubting, it shall be done. I ask for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Three times, and there were long times between, the boy Waldo opened his eyes, believing that he should see the glory of God. But nothing happened, only the sun melted the fat of the meat a little, so that it ran down between the stones. At length the lad arose and sat near by and watched his altar. "My dear God is trying me," he said, and watched on. Not until the sun cast long shadows from the sheep did he arise. Then he kicked down the altar. "God cannot lie," he said. "I had faith. No fire came. I am like Cain; I am not his. He will not hear my prayer. God hates me." But that night, when tears came, came also the Truth. "I love Jesus Christ,"

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he sobbed; "but I hate God." He was wrong of course to say that he hated God; but we know what he meant. The god who does not answer, is not God. And when Waldo said, "I love Jesus Christ," *God had answered*.

Thus we see at once the futility of the worshippers of the senses and of those who would threaten them with the falling heavens. If Baal-worship, that is to say, the glorification of the senses, is the national religion—and, surely, this assertion does not need argument—then we ought to know how we may best deal with it. We know how Jesus dealt with it. His gentleness in dealing with it constitutes one of our greatest embarrassments in understanding Him. The slavery of Mary of Magdala to her passions; the slavery of Zacchæus to mammon, must have pierced the pure soul of Jesus more deeply than the soldier's spear. We wait for the denunciation of the thunder, but it does not come. In some pleading not revealed to us He must have shown the sensualists the utter futility of the prize. Like Baal on Carmel, the god does not answer whom the senses have worshipped. Then, as now, the statement is enough to convince the sensualist out of his own experience. When the famine comes—and it comes surely and soon to the Baal-worshippers—and they "begin to be in want" there is no Baal to answer. "Cry aloud, for he is a god," or they thought him to be; but he does not answer; "either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened."

This story does not belong to the past. Worship of the senses is our besetting sin. So true is this that you

could not stir outside, you could not walk upon any street, without being beset by the worshippers of the senses before and behind. So true is this that our literature, our movies, and largely our conversation are full of it. Take one phase of it only. How many books of fiction are written to stand "the eternal triangle" firmly upon its base and make the apex point to heaven. You have but to put yourself really into that book to see that the solution is impossible. Let me take another parable from literature, this time a modern novel. A man and a woman, having repudiated their respective wife and husband, go to seek their happiness. The man is speaking:

"And so, I said, 'Good-by to London!' We said no more, but watched the South-side streets below—bright gleams of light and movement, and the dark, dim, monstrous shapes of houses and factories. We ran through Waterloo Station, London Bridge, New Cross, St. John's. We never said a word. It seemed to me that for a time we had exhausted our emotions. We had escaped, we had cut our knot, we had accepted the penalty. That was all settled. That harvest of feelings we had reaped. I thought now only of London, of London as the symbol of all we were leaving and all we had lost in the world. I felt nothing now but an enormous and overwhelming regret. . . . Then suddenly, stabbing me to the heart, came a vision of Margaret's tears (Margaret was the wife he had forsaken) and the sound of her voice. . . . I came out of a cloud of thoughts to discover the narrow compartment with its feeble lamp overhead, and our rugs and hand-baggage swaying on the rack, and Isabel, very still in front of me, gripping

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some wilting red roses in her bare and ringless hand.

"For a moment I could not understand her attitude, and then I perceived she was sitting bent together with her head averted from the light to hide the tears that were streaming down her face. She had not got her handkerchief out for fear I should see this; but I saw her tears, dark drops of tears upon her sleeve.

"For a time I stared at her and was motionless in a sort of still and weary amazement. Why had we done this injury to one another? Why? Then something stirred within me.

" 'Isabel,' I whispered.

"She made no sign.

" 'Isabel!' I repeated, and then crossed over to her, crept closely to her, put my arm about her, and drew her wet cheek to mine."²

Doctor John Hutton, to whom I am indebted for the quotation, says that tears and wilted red roses mean that "two hearts had gone out of business." It may be so; but I am inclined to think that those worshippers of the senses who cannot see in that story the rebuke to their god, Baal; who cannot see him whom they trust talking or pursuing or on a journey or asleep; who trust the easy persuasion of the literature of the period to justify them; who would scorn wilted red roses and relieving tears—it is these, I think, whose hearts have gone out of business. If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. That is forever and blessedly true. But our hearts must not be talking or pursuing or journeying or sleeping with Baal!

²Quoted by John A. Hutton, in *Our Ambiguous Life*, p. 83.

III

NOON OVER SYCHAR

IT IS noon over Sychar—"and Jacob's well was there." And the Shepherd Christ was there in the hot noonday, resting on the well curb; but of the flock there was only one far strayed lamb. Will He leave the ninety and nine, and go after the one that is lost? Yes, by His own admission He will do that, and He is doing it today. We are glad that He talked with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's deep well; for she is more typical of our wistful, wondering humanity than ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

For more reasons than one it is profitable for us to study this woman at the well. Her troubles are very modern. In the first place she is Godless, and that is a very real and a very modern tragedy. Speaking a little while ago before the representatives of sixty millions of American Christians, Doctor Albert W. Palmer of the Chicago Theological Seminary said: "Godlessness is the greatest peril of the present hour." Then Doctor Palmer went on to define what he meant by Godlessness. He did not mean, he said, "any petty breaking of the code, or staying away from Church, or playing cards on Sunday, or using profane language," and per-

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haps he would have included the besetting sin of this Samaritan woman, a too great indulgence of her senses. "These are foolish things," Doctor Palmer said, "but they do not constitute Godlessness, though they may reveal it. I mean by Godlessness just what the word means in its barest outline. *To be Godless is to have God subtracted from you!*"

That was the trouble with the woman under the Sychar noon. God had been subtracted from her life and heart and soul. I do not think it was her sinful acts altogether that had done this subtracting. She was cursed from birth with a social and a racial pride. It is true that in the village of Sychar she was known as a woman of easy virtue. That was the reason for her being here at the well at all, under the intolerable heat of a Syrian noon. Other women came to the well in the cool of the morning or the cool of the evening; but she could bear the blistering heat better than the biting tongues of her neighbors. But her trouble was deeper than that. Her trouble has been defined by St. John for all time. "*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*" This woman was a Samaritan, and as a Samaritan, she hated the Jews, as the Jews hated the Samaritans, in that racial and religious feud centuries old. That was the first thing that had subtracted God from her life. In less vital natures than hers this racial snobbery might have had a wholly different result. Who knows, for example, any of her sisters in Sychar? You cannot name one of them. Yet they were Samaritans

too. They were Godless as she, but their Godlessness took the form of their gossiping about their more attractive sister instead of trying to help her. But whatever the result, be sure that racial snobbery will subtract God. It will make an ugly rift in life.

Let us think for a moment of what it did to so great a soul as Shakespeare. We call *The Merchant of Venice* a comedy, but it is, of course, one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. It is the tragedy of race hatred. Now Elizabethan England hated the Jews, and Shakespeare was an Elizabethan snob. In that play he tried to make Shylock ridiculous. But you cannot make ridiculous a man for whom God Himself is sorry. Shakespeare could not make Shylock ridiculous. They put upon Shylock a preposterous false nose, and a grotesque red wig, but still Elizabethan England, much as she hated the Jews, found it hard to laugh at Shylock. You know that *The Merchant of Venice* is the one marred thing that Shakespeare made. The play offends against the first law of literary composition, namely, that there must be unity. Why does the play lack unity? Because there was a war in Shakespeare's soul. The divine artist in him was fighting against the Elizabethan snob. You cannot laugh at Shylock; you can only weep. And those hypocritical words of Portia about mercy being a gentle rain from heaven, only make it worse. What sweet, merciful rain fell on Shylock? There was not one drop. His property taken from him; his daughter alienated; his religion outraged. When Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, because of his racial prejudice, Art and Truth were subtracted from him.

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Now these social and racial prejudices of ours are against Christ. That is the first thing He tries to heal in this woman at the well of Sychar. He is a stranger to her, but she recognizes at once that He is one of the hated Jews. He tries to heal that breach by the simple request for a drink of water. It is simple, but it is the profoundest psychology. If you do not like some one, if some one does not like you, get him to do you a favor if you can, and you will have gone as far as one can go towards making him a friend. It does not work at once with this woman. She bridles at it a little, "How is it that you being a Jew ask water of me who am a Samaritan?" "Ah," said Jesus, "if you knew the gift of God, you would have asked of me living water. Don't you see, that old feud between the Samaritans and the Jews is a dead thing. You cannot live by old dead hates; you cannot live by hates at all. You can only live by the living water of love." But the thing is yet too profound for her. And she says two things to Jesus that show more than anything else in their conversation how far God is from her. She asks: "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us this well?" And a little later she says: "When the Messiah is come, he will tell us all things." Do you see? "Our father Jacob" in the remote past; the Messiah, as she thinks, in some remote future; these two remotes are all this woman has of religion. Is not this too an ailing spot, a tragedy in the race? Let me appeal again to Shakespeare. That roystering old knight, Sir John Falstaff, is an example of those whose religion has been left far back in the remote past. Dame Quickly who attended Falstaff at his dy-

ing is an example of those who believe in putting God off into as remote a future as you can. Dame Quickly tells us that when old John Falstaff lay dying, he fumbled with the counterpane, and he "babbled o' green fields." Dame Quickly did not know, what was probably blessedly true, that when the old worldling was dying and "babbling o' green fields," his early, but forgotten God, was coming very near to him. For I believe that that "babbling o' green fields" was poor John Falstaff trying to recall the green pastures and the still waters of the Twenty-third Psalm his childhood lips had recited; or else it meant that he was a little child again in the daisied meadows of England, stumbling through the grass. Was the Godless old knight trying to recover God? Evidently he was, for Dame Quickly says that he fumbled again with the counterpane and said, "God, God, God," two or three times. And then we have the other remote, for Dame Quickly tells him that he need not trouble about God for a long time to come! That is it, you see. That is our Godlessness, Falstaff's Godlessness, and Dame Quickly's Godlessness, and the woman of Sychar's Godlessness. "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us this well?" We do not know when, or under what circumstances, Jacob dug that well; but we may be very sure that God was in the digging of it. Whatever faults Jacob had—and he had many—he knew that God was near. We get our hymn "Nearer, my God, to thee" from that stone pillow on a lonely hillside, when the homesick lad, Jacob, lays his head on it, and sleeps and dreams of the ladder that leans against the very doorstep of God. But,

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poor daughter of Jacob, you cannot quench your thirst from Jacob's old, deep well! And to your pathetic postponement of a decision until Messiah shall come in some far future, the Christ who talks with you will say: "I that speak unto thee am He!"

Still she tries to parry the truth that is seeking her soul. She tries to get Him into a theological argument. That is the last resort of one who will not face the immanent God. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship?" "I do not say that," is Jesus' quick reply, in effect. "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, and now is, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."

Now, the button is off the foil, and the thrust goes home. God is a Father—she hears it for the first time in her Godless life. God is a Spirit. God is everywhere. God is at this well. He is not back there with her father Jacob. God is not in some remote future when Messiah shall come. God is here and now! What memories of her own childhood were awakened in that word "Father" we do not know; but in that moment, through her blindness, she saw! So a little blind girl of our generation wrote out of her dark:

I know what Mother's face is like,
Although I cannot see:
It's like the music of a bell;
It's like the way the roses smell;
It's like the secrets fairies tell;
All these it is to me.

I know what Father's strength is like;
I'm sure I know it all;
It's like his whistle on the air;
It's like his step upon the stair;
It's like his arms that take such care,
And never let me fall.

So I can tell what God is like,
Who hears my faintest call:
He's everything my mother means;
He's everything my father seems;
He's like my very sweetest dreams;
But greater than them all.¹

Our greatest discovery is to know God like that. It is to penetrate the blindness of a little child with the Light that is never on the theologian's land or sea. It is to send this woman back to her village, crying, "Come and see." It can do more than that. If somehow we may get it known, it can penetrate even the brutish heart, and make it soft to do good and not evil. Do you remember that incident in Robert Louis Stevenson's great psychological story, *Ebb-Tide*. In that incident three of the worst rogues in literature, having stolen a schooner, have sailed into the lagoon to murder Atwater, the planter. And Atwater knows it. Atwater is a very religious man, a mystic. He goes down to meet those villains. He has taken no measures to protect his life. He has even waved aside any interference of his servants, and he proposes to these desperate men that

¹Quoted by W. Erskine Blackburn, in *The Christian World Pulpit*, Oct. 24, 1935, p. 196.

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they have dinner with him on the veranda. The psychological moment, as we say, has arrived. The brutal Davis holds the cocked pistol under the table with which he is about to shoot the planter. Herrick, the ex-Oxford man, and therefore the most intelligent, and therefore the most dangerous, is tense with the movement of this drama of death. With deliberate intent, like a surgeon's, Atwater has been probing for these men's consciences. Suddenly he reaches forward, and strikes a little silver bell on the table. Stevenson tells us that the note of that bell rang out clear and far into the night, until it lingered in the porches of the ear, a vibration that was sound no longer. "Empty house, empty beach, empty sea," said Atwater, "yet God hears the bell. And we sit on this veranda, on a lighted stage, with all heaven for spectators." The brutal captain sat mesmerized. At length he blurted out: "Why did you do that? Do you sit here evenings and ring up God?" "As a matter of fact, one does not," said Atwater. "Why ring a bell when there is a more momentous silence? The least beat of our hearts, the least thoughts of our minds, echoing into the ears of God forever and forever and forever."

Well, you know what would happen. These brutal men cannot do the deed, and they slink away. It made such a powerful impression on the ex-Oxford man, that later, on the schooner, when in shame and disgust he lets himself down into the sea and tries to drown, he cannot. He could not keep his hands and feet from moving that kept him afloat. I wonder how much there is in your law, and in your police, and in your locks and

keys, that keeps violence within some sort of bounds,
out there in the world!

Oh, in this noon over Sychar; in this hot and fevered
and foolish noon; if we might know and help men to
know that God is here!

IV

NOON OVER DAMASCUS

IT IS noon, high noon, over Damascus; but the meridian lamp casts no shadow from any sheep. The flocks are fled to hiding; for the wolf is come! Do you ask what wolf? There is but one wolf that every sheep of the Good Shepherd fears. Had not the Good Shepherd warned them? "The wolf cometh, and catcheth the sheep, and scattereth them." But the prophecy of this wolf was older than that. In his great little book on *Paul and Paulinism*, Doctor James Moffatt quotes the words of the strange African father, Tertullian. "Genesis," says Tertullian, "promised me Paul long ago. For when Jacob was pronouncing typical and prophetic blessings over his sons, he turned to Benjamin and said, 'Benjamin is a ravening wolf; in the morning he shall devour his prey, but towards evening he shall provide food.'"

Let me say, in passing, that you could not have a better outline than that for a "Life of Saint Paul." It is a morning of devouring; it is an afternoon of providing food for the sheep. And Paul himself never denied that morning of the ravening wolf, not even the

dawn of it, when the twelve glittered in the dying eyes of the old sheepmaster, Jacob, and he said, "Benjamin is a ravening wolf." Proudly to the Philippians did Paul say, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: of the stock of Israel, *of the tribe of Benjamin*, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee."

But that morning of ravening is done now; this Damascus noon will hack away that hardened morning as with a great broad sword. Yet we must pick up the morning to understand the afternoon. Another distinguished scholar will help us here. Doctor T. R. Glover has given us a glimpse of the little boy, Saul, at Tarsus. He is sitting with his father studying Hebrew. He is picking out one by one the words in the old characters. Finally he comes to a word of four letters—JHVH—and the boy stumbles. He knows all the letters but he cannot pronounce the word, and when he tries to do so his father puts his hand over his lips. "No," his father says, "do not say it; we never say that word. When you come to it always says this instead. . . ." And the father gives him a word meaning "the Lord." Doctor Glover thinks little Saul never forgot the unspeakable word that must always be "the Lord"; he kept it until the time came when he gave that word to Another as a Name—and the Other kept it forever! For "Lord" means ownership, it means utter mastership of that Other over the man who gives it as a Name; it means a brand which sears itself into the very soul, as the brand bites into the quivering flesh of the cattle in the Southwest. We cannot understand Saul of Tarsus of the

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morning, nor Saint Paul of the afternoon, without that brand. He was born to bear some ownership that went through him utterly as the core of red silk runs through an alpine rope. His life was cut through as with a sword, as I have said, at Damascus, but the core was there at each severed end. Something had to master him, and in the morning it was the ravening wolf—the ordained hangman—the blameless Pharisee thinking that he did God service in spilling the Nazarene and his band out of history.

This youth studied hard under Gamaliel, greatest of the Jewish teachers, and spoke gratefully of that tutelage when he was defending his very life. But there came a day when the great *Rabbin* displeased the ravening wolf in his pupil. Gamaliel was not only the greatest of the Jewish teachers; he was also the most tolerant. Did he not say to the council when it thirsted for the blood of the Nazarene's witnesses: "I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply, ye be found even to fight against God . . . and to him they agreed." But not the ravening wolf! That day, young Saul did not "sit at the feet" of the Rabbin, but sprang to his own feet, and would have none of it! If it be of God forsooth! How could this Galilean blasphemer against Israel be of God? Him had they most justly gibbeted. Had He been of God? And these skulking peasants who declared that He was not dead, but had survived the nails and a Roman spear-thrust, were they, and their lie, of God? With flashing eyes, with

that conviction that had come over him spelling out an unspeakable word in Tarsus long ago, with that burning mandate upon him that something must so master one that one must deal out death itself for the sake of its truth—with that, Saul is upon his feet, and ready to take his road.

It was not long before Saul met death on that road. He did not deal out that death himself. He threw no stone that battered out the young life of Christianity's first martyr. But he held the cloaks of those who threw the stones, that with arms ungirt they might the sooner obliterate that face of Stephen that looked so much like the face of an angel. There is no evidence that Saul was moved to one jot of pity at that angelic face. It was a bloody business, and it were well to have proper warrants from the authorities for his hunting of Christians in Damascus, where he understood the hunting would be excellent. It was a little out of the way—this Damascus—a "strange city"; but if the sheep strayed to strange cities, in strange cities they must be persecuted. So the high priests' warrant blotted out the young deacon's face that was like the face of an angel. Or did it? It is a long way to Damascus; it is likely to be five days the way the man with the warrant is travelling, five days . . . and five nights, too. One will have to sleep . . . if one can. . . . It is the nights that are hardest. . . . Will this be like Judas, going back to those priests, with the blood-money? . . . Will the blood on that face be like the blood on the money? . . . That would make "money talk" perhaps. . . . Perhaps Stephen might talk in spite of those hurtling stones.

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Would the Damascus road anticipate the road that Eugene Aram took in Lytton's novel, when he could not forget the body of Daniel Green that floated face upward in the stream?

I am asking these questions, because they have to do with an answer. For this utterly conscientious sheriff with a search warrant for Christians; this man who will serve that warrant as of the Law without a qualm; this man who, by his own confession, persecuted both men *and women*; who dragged women from their beds and flogged them half to death—this Thunderbolt is going to meet a Sunbeam at Damascus, and be slain by the light of It! The statement is not rhetorical; it is quite the literal truth. It is what the erstwhile Thunderbolt himself will say, when the Sunbeam has long possessed him, and it is all that he can say. He said it on the stairs of the barracks, before the mob, "Nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me." He said it before Agrippa, when he was bound hand and foot, and knew that he was fighting for his very life; he challenged that enthroned materialism to believe in a Ray of Light: "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven."

Now it does seem preposterous to say that a Sunbeam can stop a Thunderbolt. It helps a little when it is said that the Thunderbolt went blind. And the blindness is explained further when it is known that the Thunderbolt was not physically strong. Were there not symptoms? Something about a mysterious "thorn" later on? Was there not impaired eyesight? And the

man fell down in the road. This looks like epilepsy to those who do not like anything that looks like the supernatural. And so it was epilepsy that ailed Paul at Damascus, until Joseph Parker reminded the diagnosticians that their epileptic took Christianity from a corner and flung it over a planet. "Fly on," said Joseph Parker, "thou mighty epilepsy!"

But let us not be absurd. The preacher whom I heard the other day was kinder. He thought that the Light blinding Paul was an "hysterical blindness." Well, one could answer that too, by saying "fly on, thou hysteria." But somehow one feels that hysteria could not have conquered the Roman Empire, and have put crosses on American churches and Bibles in American homes. And if there is to be a consultation around this stricken man in the Damascus dust, will not some one speak up and say, *May it not be that Saul was blinded by tears!* Not sudden tears, of course; maybe they had been pent up there behind those eyes ever since those eyes looked on Stephen; maybe they were gathering in the dead unhappy nights on the road; maybe the Voice had something to do with bringing them forth—for there was a Voice, and it spake the man's name, and it spake not in anger, not at all, but it asked a question, "Why persecutest thou me?" It is hard for thee, it said, to kick against the goads. Yes, it was hard; it had been hard all the way. "Say Lord instead," my father had said, "when you come to the unspeakable . . ." Was this it—the unspeakable? Anyway, that was the word that leaped to the lips of the man down there in the dust. "Who art thou, *Lord?*" But you have answered your

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question, Saul. Lord He is, and Lord He will be. And from then on, the record says, they took the Thunderbolt by the hand—took him like a little hurt and bewildered and blind child and led him into the city. Doctor Glover is right. There was to come a time when Paul was to take that word “Lord” and give it to Another, and that Other was to wear it forever!

Let me hold up before you briefly three things that we learn in this noon over Damascus. The first is that love, as St. Paul himself said, is the greatest thing in the world. It was the accent of love, no less than the meekness of the rebuke—“Why do you persecute me, Saul?”—that converted the would-be persecutor into the planetary missionary. It is true that he could not kick against that goad. And if love were tried out everywhere it would be found that it alone has the tyrant strength. I have read of a well-authenticated incident in a certain woman’s reformatory. There was a girl in that institution, the most incorrigible of all the inmates, and upon whom the most drastic punishment was visited in vain. One day when Kate had been particularly troublesome, the superintendent did that which no social disciplinarian should ever do. The superintendent, being very tired, burst into tears. The sullen girl in the strait-jacket, seeing her warder’s tears, cried out: “Why are you crying?” “I am crying because we have tried to help you, Kate, and you won’t let us.” Kate was silent for a moment, and then she said: “Well, no one ever cried over me before. They have beaten me; they have even threatened to kill me; but I knew they dare not do it. You can take me out of this jacket; I

shall never give you any trouble again; but do anything to me you like, except cry over me, for your tears are breaking my heart." Kate was taken at her word, and she became the savior of that institution as long as she was there. When any other girl gave trouble, they said, "Send for Kate; she knows how to deal with them." It is indeed hard to kick against love's goad!

Again, the Damascus noon burned away all the mist that surrounded this mighty personality. Of all that have stripped themselves naked—and there are only a few—Paul is the most shameless in his confessions. They send out long agonizing cries from every letter he wrote. There is war in all his members! His flesh contends against his spirit! He does the things he hates, and what he would do he cannot do! He is chained to something that is like a body of death! He fears to be a castaway! He is the chief of sinners! No one, of course, has ever taken Paul at his word, because we never strip our souls to the world, nor do we ever hear such utter candor. But we are dealing here with no ordinary man. We are dealing with a man who is willing to be damned in the sight of any one who will take him seriously, if so be he can make the most despairing to fight on, if so be at the last that one can say with him, "I have fought a good fight; I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." As F. W. H. Myers makes him say:

Can it be true the grace he is declaring?

Ay, we must trust him; for his words are fair.

Man, what is this? And why art thou despairing?

God shall forgive thee all but thy despair!

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The third thing, then, that is revealed to us in the Damascus noon must be patience. Is there a ravening wolf in us? Oh, we have not been potential murderers of some Stephen; we have never flogged men and women to bend them to our fanaticism; we have never believed, or said, that we are the chief of sinners; we have never hurt Jesus so much that He has cried out against that persecution in sharpest pain. Maybe the wolf is more like one of those little foxes that destroy the vines. Maybe it is some cowardly little beast that slinks in the shadows and does its mischief. Maybe it is a hyena-like creature that laughs at things, only its laughter is not wholesome or good to hear. Whatever it may be, is there not some beast that sleeps in us, some beast that slept warm in the blood of all our ancestors, all the way back in the race? Paul was not talking of four-footed things when he said: "If after the manner of men, I fought with beasts at Ephesus." If you have no trouble, friend, be glad of it; but stand aside from this man, Paul; he is not for you. If you do have to fight, study this man, never giving up, never despairing, never doubting—until at last, like him, you are bathed in the glory of God. In the morning he devoured the flock. But there was a Noon and a Light and a Voice. And in the afternoon he fed the flock as no other earthly shepherd ever fed them. "O thou sublime, sweet Evening Star!"

V

NOON OVER CALVARY

THE SUN rides high over the meridian. But what dark is here! "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." Each of the synoptics records the fact of that darkness from noon until three o'clock, but not one of them attempts an explanation. Easy, too easy, explanations have been attempted. It was an eclipse of the sun. But an eclipse of the sun would have been astronomically impossible. The paschal moon was at its full. Some have ventured the opinion that it may have been a "dust storm," such as has darkened the noon of the American Southwest in recent years. That vivid Russian, Merejkowski, in a recent book has said that it was the *khamsin*, "a darkness which present-day inhabitants of Jerusalem know well. It resembles an eclipse of the sun." This darkness which the present-day inhabitants of Jerusalem know well probably is a dust storm. It is not the dark that hid the meridian sun over Calvary. Whatever that darkness was, falling from the heights of Moab, welling up from the ravines at the base of Golgotha, fading the gleam on Roman shield and helmet—this Egyptian

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night at high noon is not to be pierced by natural explanations.

What is the explanation? The late Doctor David James Burrell says: "The Jews had oftentimes clamored for a sign, a sign whereby they might test this sufferer's Messianic claim. Had the sign come? Were these shadows the trappings of a universal woe? Was God thus manifesting his wrath against sin?"¹ And vividly Joseph Parker wrote of this dark: "O thou great hell, take the victory. Spirit of evil, damned from all eternity, mount the central cross and mock the dead as thou hast mocked the living! The night is dark enough—no such night ever settled upon the earth before. Will the light ever come again? Is the sun clean gone forever? Will the blue sky ever more kiss the green earth? All the birds are dead, their music is choked; the angels have fled away and the morning stars have dropped their sweet hymn. This is chaos with an added darkness. What is happening?"

"Maybe"—continues Joseph Parker—"maybe God and Christ are communing in the secret places away beyond these mountains of night. Maybe that this *murder* will become the world's *Sacrifice*. Maybe that out of this blasphemy will come a Gospel for every creature."²

Well, that is precisely what did come out of it, the world's Sacrifice, a Gospel for every creature. Out of that dark came a strange cry—the strangest cry on Calvary that day—a cry that was misunderstood by

¹*The Gospel of Gladness*, p. 233.

²See *The People's Bible*, Vol. XX, p. 268.

some who stood, or sat, there in the darkness, and understood by others to their complete terror. I say that cry out of the dark, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was the strangest cry from Calvary that day; it was the only one among the seven that was strange. The cry of forgiveness, the cry of pardon to the penitent, the cry of comfort to the Mother, the natural cry of thirst, the triumphant cry of that which was finished, the perfect cry of the yielded spirit—these constitute no difficulty at all. But ever since Calvary we have peered into this dark, listened to that strange cry, and tried to interpret it.

There has been the most common interpretation, the interpretation of the wishful heart. For probably all of us have uttered that cry at one time or another, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But on our lips is that cry strange? Is it even true? Have we not ourselves forsaken God in such moments, rather than that He has forsaken us? But it is a sad cry nevertheless, and its misery has loved the company of that cry from the lips of Jesus. Is it not a comfort, that if we have felt ourselves forsaken the great Hero of Golgotha felt himself forsaken, too—and said so?

But what comfort would that be to us? "It would be the comfort," a penetrating commentator has said—"it would be the comfort which I should have experienced when, as a little child, I was frightened and ran to my mother for comfort, and found her as frightened as myself!" No; let the strong Son of God be Himself strong in our most need. And if it be argued, as it is, that Jesus must be tempted in all points like as we are, that He

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must feel forsaken as we feel God-forsaken, then perhaps in Gethsemane, in that bloody sweat, He did feel forsaken. But no; even there, as George Matheson has said, He was not concerned that God had forsaken mankind; He was only concerned that mankind had forsaken God. Were not those in whom he had most trusted sleeping now in the moonlight, only a stone's cast away?

Preachers of the Passion, who, as I have said, have commonly interpreted that cry as meaning that for a moment God had let go of the hand that was nailed, have themselves admitted the difficulty of such an explanation. "He was forsaken, but really of course He was not!" Either He was forsaken, or He was not. Either He opened the door of Eternal Love to a penitent thief, to have it the next moment slammed in the face of both of them, or that cry from the cross did not mean what it is commonly believed to have meant.

I have said that it was misunderstood even by those who stood so near when it was uttered that they could hear the blood dripping from His hands and feet. As He uttered it in that dialect of the Aramaic, which was His accustomed speech, some thought that on account of the similarity of one of the words to the name of the most rugged of the prophets, He was calling to Elijah. But there were those there who did not misunderstand it. There were those there who recognized that His Words were a quotation from Israel's *Te Deum*, from their greatest song of victory. In consequence, it was then that His enemies began to beat upon their breasts in terror, and whose whitened faces stood out even in that dark. Had they killed God! If they had not been

sure in that moment that instead of a cry of defeat it was a cry of victory, would they not have tumbled through that dark to run quickly to Pilate and to Caiaphas, and to have said: "You were right. He has made a deathbed confession that even His God has forsaken Him!"

But if that cry does not mean what it is commonly interpreted to mean, what does it mean? Let history and prophecy make answer. We know that Good Friday—the Great Day of Atonement—was the perfect complement of another Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. On that Old Testament Day of Atonement there was a strange and dramatic ritual. Then a whole great people, confessing their sins for an entire year, saw their sins heaped upon a poor little beast—the scape-goat—and the goat led away "unto a land not inhabited." That ritual, so vividly described in Leviticus, captured the imagination of an American novelist and was commented upon in two of his novels. James Lane Allen said that we might smile at the childishness of those old Hebrews in seeing a nation's sins being led out of sight on a poor little inoffensive beast. Do we do better, he asked, when we put off our sins with our clothes at night, and put them on with our clothes in the morning? They at least heaped them upon a beast for which they did not care; we heap them upon those whom we love best. And James Lane Allen is right. They did believe in God's forgiveness. They believed that their sins were taken away to a place where they would be remembered no more, where there would be no newspaper reporters, no gossipers, to bring back a traveller's

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tale, no enemy to fling them again into the shamed faces of the penitent. They were borne away, in that vivid, unforgettable phrase, "unto a land not inhabited." "Uninhabited"—that is to say, unto a place where even God would not be, to remember their sins against them forever.

Holman Hunt has painted the picture of the scapegoat in that desolation. Very white is that poor little beast, and very pathetic, and around his horn still that scarlet piece of cloth that was tied there for the same reason that there is a red traffic light at the crossing. That red cloth meant danger; it meant that a creature bearing such a weight of sins—that damned thing—must not be approached, must not be touched. So we are told by Fiona MacLeod in *The Sin Eater*, the little children of Ireland would climb fearfully up the bank when the "sin eater" came down the road. For the "sin eater" was a poor tramp who, for a few coppers, would eat bread and salt above the bodies of those who had died in their sins, and so take upon himself those unshriven sins; and, him, the children avoided, and were afraid! Poor "sin eater," poor little beast of a scapegoat in the uninhabited waste! It is a terrible thing for anything, for *any one* to be so terribly alone. Well might it wring forth a cry such as "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But let us save our pity for the true and only Sin Bearer. There was no completeness in that old Hebrew Day of Atonement. And that poor little scapegoat could never bear away the sins of the world. "*For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices*

which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. . . . For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins . . . but this man (our Redeemer), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . and their sins and iniquities (God said), will I remember no more.”³

History then comes to this darkness, to this noon over Calvary. But prophecy comes to this noon also. For when the true Sin Bearer should come, it was prophesied of Him that He should be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; and by His stripes we should be healed. It was further prophesied that when He came He should, bearing the world's burden of sin, go into a place of outer darkness in expiatory pain. That was the prophecy. Was it fulfilled in that “outer darkness” on Calvary? Was it then that those daring words of St. Paul were made finally effectual: “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him?” Was that cry in the dark, that cry which we have taken to be a cry of despair, really a clarion cry of victory? Two of the evangelists, St. Mark and St. Matthew, in recording that cry, use a word that has been traced, in the curiosity of a scholar, to forty-one uses in the New Testament. He assures us that the word “always expresses a consciousness of triumph or of authority. It is the only term employed to describe the crowing of the cock just before dawn, proverbially the most triumphant sound in nature. It is used to describe the voice

³Hebrews 10:1-17.

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in which Jesus summoned the daughter of Jairus from death and Lazarus from the sepulchre. It indicates the sovereignty of Jesus in calling his disciples. In that same tone He summoned blind Bartimæus to be healed, and Mary when she arose quickly and came unto Him.”⁴ I have asked you to accompany Doctor William Burnet Wright on this excursion into exegesis where you may see there is internal evidence and there was no despair in that cry in the dark.

Let me, as I close, go back to the beginning. What dark is here in this Calvary noonday! It is the impenetrable mystery of the forgiveness of sin. That God should forgive our sin is no mystery at all. The very nature of God and the central fact of His revelation places His forgiveness beyond debate. The unending mercy of forgiving grace runs through the Scriptures from end to end. But we must not forget the connecting thread is scarlet. It is as red as blood. It is as real as blood. In the early dawn of Israel it is the blood of the goat that was slain on the altar, and it is the agony of the other goat left to die in the desolation of “the land not inhabited.” In the noonday darkness of Calvary, it is the blood of the Redeeming Christ. At a terrible cost God forgives sin. But God pays the cost. In the sacrifice of His Son, God answers St. Paul’s question, “How can a man be just before God?” But, as we all know, there is a question that troubles sinful man far more than the question, “How can a man be just before God?” It is the question, “*How can a man be just before himself?*” How can a man who is truly penitent,

⁴William Burnet Wright, *The Heart of the Master*, p. 233.

who has made all possible restitution, who has wept bitterly, and repented in dust and ashes—how can he feel that he is forgiven? Believe me, this is not a rhetorical question. Humanity at this moment, careless though it may seem, is hag-ridden by the weight of misdeeds that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven and forgotten. How then shall humanity have assurance of forgiveness? For this purpose God condescends to our imprisonment in our senses. We say that "seeing is believing." God let those ancient Hebrews see their sins being borne away on the scapegoat "to a land not inhabited." That was not much, but it was the best that they could apprehend. On Calvary the true Sin Bearer sent back that weird, startling cry from the place of repented sins, that place not inhabited even of God, that place that Isaiah must have meant when he said: "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." And as George Macdonald said: "Behind the back of God is Nowhere."

One will not be accused of preaching an easy Gospel if he pleads with you to believe in the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness can never be easy, it can never be without cost, not only to God, but to the one forgiven.

If Thou hadst not been stern with me,
But set me free,
I had forgot myself and Thee.
For minds ill-bent rarely repent
Until they reach some punishment.
Yet I'll come in before my loss
Me further toss, as sure to win
Beneath the Cross.⁵

⁵These lines were written out by a nurse in a hospital for me many years ago. She attributed them to Ben Jonson. I have never seen the lines in print, and have not been able to identify them.

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That cry from the dark, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is our Saviour's cry that our sins have been taken away beyond remembrance. Then, for God's sake, and for Christ's sake, may we let our repented sins alone!

PART THREE

"SPEAKING GOOD OF HIS NAME"

I

*"IT IS HE THAT HATH MADE US, AND NOT
WE OURSELVES"*

II

"WHITHER SHALL I GO FROM THY SPIRIT?"

III

"OUT OF THE DEEP

IV

"AGAINST THEE ONLY HAVE I SINNED"

V

"YOUR HEART SHALL LIVE FOREVER"

“The stark simplicity and candor, the utter honesty and unsullied sincerity of the psalmists, can hardly be too strongly emphasized or too highly evaluated. Abbé Fénelon’s counsel was, ‘If God tires you, tell him so.’ This is the attitude of the psalmists. This kind of thing they are constantly doing. They make no attempt to conceal anything from God. They take him wholly into their confidence. They pour out their hearts before him. Their sins, their anger, their hopes, and their fears are all laid at his feet.”

From *The Psalms, Translated*
by J. M. Powis Smith.

I

“*IT IS HE THAT HATH MADE US,
AND NOT WE OURSELVES*”

Psalm C

WHY DO we go to church? I suppose there is no better answer to this question than is given in the One Hundredth Psalm, the familiar *Jubilate* of many manuals of praise to God. In the One Hundredth Psalm, the poet of Israel tells us plainly why we enter the gates of God's House. He says that it is that we may “be thankful unto Him and speak good of His Name.”

You have heard that Psalm chanted by the choir, or read responsively by the congregation many times. Have you really ever thought how it is that the Psalmist in that Psalm “speaks good of God's Name?” It is one of the most daring things that was ever said of the Almighty. Listen to it, and while you listen, think. “*It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.*”

Is that to speak good of God's Name? May it not be to speak very boldly indeed of God's Name? For the poet of Israel, in those daring words, is throwing back into the very face of God some of the responsibility for his own life! Not, of course, every wilful sin, not every false choice deliberately made, not every hurt and

wound and scar which self has inflicted. You will not understand the Psalmist to mean that. If he meant that we could not support him in it.

But that is not what the Psalmist means. And he certainly does not mean merely to say that God is his Creator. That is too obvious to need saying. No; this poet purposely and deliberately repeats his words for emphasis to show what he does mean. "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." He is saying that Wordsworth, a much later poet, is not telling all the truth when he says: "Trailing clouds of glory do we come from heaven which is our home." We do trail clouds of glory. Look into the face of a little babe, and you will have the nearest glimpse of heaven you will ever have in this world. But watch that babe as it gets its second breath in this world that is not exactly heaven. Watch it as it lifts its tiny hands to grasp at the moon, and you will see there in embryo instincts of acquisitiveness that later may work far more tragic consequences than to tear the moon out of the sky. How often do we hear it said of the naughtiness of a child, "Where does he get that?" And that is often said honestly, for you cannot always trace those traits to the immediate heredity or environment of that child. No, also trailing far unlovelier things than clouds of glory do we come into this world. Why was Jesus' first cry from the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? Well, I am very near here to giving my whole thesis away, and it is a little too early for that. But let me say this at this time. It is said again and again in the Bible that God is a God of Truth. And Jesus said

to Pilate, when His very life was at stake, “For this cause came I into the world that I might bear witness to the Truth.”

I will say this then, at the beginning, that the poet of Israel is speaking good of God’s Name, because he is daring to speak the truth. I do not think this frank statement of God’s responsibility is a welcome truth today. It certainly was not the emphasis which the theologians and preachers of yesterday put upon either God or man. Down on your knees and confess that you are a miserable sinner, and leave God’s awful holiness out of it! It is not the emphasis that some of the later theologies are putting upon either God or man.

Probably one of the tallest figures on the theological horizon today is Karl Barth. I cannot discuss here how Karl Barth, at first at least, affected religious thinking among the specialists. But I will give you an example. In one of Karl Barth’s sermons, he is discussing that beautifully tender word of God in the Fifty-fourth Chapter of Isaiah. There God says: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.” Would you like the Holy God to say that to you? You have known that forsaken moment. How could the Holy God look upon the unworthy thing you did? But that dark moment passed, and I am sure you have dared to believe that the great mercies of your God—greater than that small moment of guilt or shame or remorse, greater than an hour, or a year, or a lifetime—compassed you about. What does Karl Barth say about that? This is what he says: “This text speaks of a small moment. But it is the moment of wrath, when

God has forsaken us and hid His face from us; while the waters of Noah go over the earth, and the mountains depart, and the hills are removed. In a 'small moment' Adam sinned and in a 'small moment' Christ died on the Cross. But how great was and is a 'small moment'?"

Well, what do you think of that "small moment" of guilty feeling now? Did that moment when you felt yourself forsaken of God ever really pass? If Adam sinned in that sixty seconds, and Christ died in that sixty seconds, what may have happened to you in it? God says that He has a great mercy that is endless to redeem that small dark moment, but this great theologian says that in that small moment the waters of Noah may have gone over your earth.

What does many a preacher say from the pulpit to-day? Not the great Karl Barth of Basle, but the mill run of preachers in our churches? It may be that they do not say anything about it. It may be that they tell you only to be good. It may be that they just let that tremendous line in the *Jubilate* go, caring only that the choir sing it well, before going on with the rest of the service. Not long ago, I said to a congregation—I was not preaching on the *Jubilate*, but it had been sung exceptionally well, and I was afraid the lovely music of it may have drugged some of them as to its meaning—so I said in the sermon: "Did you understand what the choir sang in that verse in the *Jubilate*? Do you realize what a tremendous thing, what a tremendously daring thing it is to say of God: 'It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves?'" And afterwards a woman, and I know her to be a good woman, said to

me: “I shall remember as long as I live the comfort you gave me today.”

Well, whose fault is it, I ask you, if in telling people to be good, they should never be told how good God is? Nay; if they are not told *why* God is good; why He may forsake us for a brief moment but will remember us lovingly for seventy years; why He cannot condone one small sin in us because of His awful holiness; but why on account of that awful holiness He must assume His responsibility for our lives! For it is either true, or it is not, that “It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.”

Let us cease thinking of this through reason, and think of it through human experience. That is always the way Jesus took to show us God. When they asked Jesus what God is like, He would ask them to think what man is like. “What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one doth not leave the ninety and nine, and go after the one that is lost?” Well, God is just like that. The man knows that his sheep is silly. It is greedy for the best pastures. It will wander off head down because it is made that way, and it did not make itself. The man feels his responsibility for that silly sheep. A woman has ten coins, and she loses one, and she lights a candle and sweeps the floor and looks and looks and looks. Better be careful with coins. They are round and they will roll under the bureau, or into a dark corner. They are made that way. A man’s boy goes away into a far country. It was wrong; but he was not the first, and he will not be the last. And even if he were the first and the last, that old father could not let him go!

Here is a child in trouble, in deep trouble. Whatever society says of that child, whatever the courts may say, his parents will say, "You do not know all about that boy. He is not wholly bad. You do not know what circumstances contributed to his downfall." It may be that that boy must receive the full punishment for his offense; but you would think his parents worse than himself if they damned him, and let him go. Well, what would we think of God if He would let *us* go? Why is it that George Matheson's hymn, "O Love that wilt not let me go," has taken the high place it has among the hymns of Christendom? The thesis of that hymn is quite different from the thesis of the One Hundredth Psalm. Yet the daring challenge is the same. It may be supposed that when George Matheson says in that hymn, "I yield my flickering torch to Thee," he was thinking of his physical blindness, for George Matheson was then as blind as the grave. God was not responsible for George Matheson's blindness, any more than George Matheson was himself responsible for it. But his blindness was there. It was there in a universe that is filled with light. And George Matheson rightly held that God's love would not let him go.

Now suppose it is not a blindness of the optic nerve; suppose it is a blindness of faith, a "blind spot," let us say, in a person's faith. Thomas, the Apostle, evidently had that blind spot. In the few instances in which you find him in the New Testament, he always exhibits that dimness in matters of faith. Why is Jesus so patient with that man? It is true Jesus rebukes him, but not because he is half blind, but because he had not dared believe in

spite of his half blindness. We are impatient with Thomas. We have daubed him “doubting Thomas.” But Jesus did not scorn Thomas. Why are we not as tender toward the psychic defects in people as we are toward the physical defects? We do not scold the blind lad because he cannot paint, and we are not hard on the lame boy because he cannot run. Where is our pity for the natural defects of character? If Emerson is right when he says that when a certain man and a certain woman meet at the corner of the street, they are ripe to be each other’s victim, nay, that they were ripe for it generations before they were born; if Emerson is right about that, what has God to say about it? We may say to these people, as the policeman said to Little Jo in *Bleak House*, “Move on!” And you remember what Little Jo said: “I’m always a-moving on, Sir, a-moving on ever since I was born. Where can I possibly move to, Sir, more nor I do move?” And you remember that God-sent voice that came to Little Jo, when he was dying, and told him what this Psalm tells us, that it is God who hath made us, and not we ourselves. That God-sent voice told Little Jo that God was his Father. “He is my Father, Sir?”, said Little Jo, “He is my Father, Sir? That is wery, wery good, Sir.”

I am trying to interpret what this Psalmist dares to say about God, and what the Christian Church must wish to dare to say about God, in incorporating this Psalm into so much of her worship, and what is here in the Psalm called “speaking good of God’s Name.” If this will help us to know God better and to love Him better, and to serve Him better, and to live better lives,

then I want to say it. I do not want to say just "Be good" and then say, as they were always saying to Little Jo, "Move on!"

In the story of the Exodus, God seemed to be saying to the children of Israel, "Move on!" And there came a time when they did not move on. They lay encamped, and they committed what God called an "abomination." And plain as day, Moses, their leader, seemed to hear God saying to him: "I have looked upon this people, and they are a stiff-necked people. I am going to destroy them, I am going to wipe them off the face of the earth." Moses believed that. Yet he stood between that people and the wrath of God. I wish I could make you see that scene; for it is one of the most dramatic in all history. I see that people without a defense in justice, and without a defense against the wrath of their outraged God, and I see Moses with his hair and beard streaming in the wind, expecting every moment the thunderbolts to fall; and yet, as he spreads out his arms to protect the cowering crowd behind him, daring to scream into the face of God: "If you destroy this people what will the heathen say? The heathen have lined the road all this lengthened way you have brought this people from Egypt to this hour! You brought them out of Egypt; they did not ask to come. You brought them out by your mighty hand and your stretched-out arm. Will not the heathen say, 'He brought them out that He might slay them in the wilderness?' Blot me out of thy Book if you must; but you shall not destroy this people. What will the heathen say?" Then we are told that God repented of the evil that He would visit upon that people. But

there is a mistake here somewhere. How can God repent? How can He change His mind? “In Him is no variableness, neither shadow made by turning.” No; but there is variableness in us. And we know that God never told Moses that He would destroy that people. We know it as we know that God did not tip over a tower at Siloam because eighteen sinners and atheists happened to be standing under it. “If God were tipping towers,” said Jesus, in effect, “you had all better look out!”

“It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” It does not mean, as I have said, that we can shunt the responsibility of our sins upon God. It does mean, if it means anything, that God is responsible for us, far more responsible than any earthly father can be for his children. I think that just now that responsibility must be weighing very heavily even upon God. Not long ago, a brilliant student was being examined in New York for the ministry. The examiners asked him what he thought of the condition of the world, meaning of course, its people. He made this answer: “I think the world is going straight to hell.” Then, he added, “straight to hell, but for the grace of God.” What is the grace of God? It is certainly something that is against human reason. It is something with which human reason is always in debate with the Church.

Reason cries: “If God were good, He could not look upon the sin and misery of men and live! It would break His heart!”

The Church points to the Crucifixion and says: “God’s heart did break.”

Reason cries: “Born and reared in sin and pain as

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we are, how can we keep from sin. It is the Creator who is responsible; it is God who deserves to be punished."

The Church kneels by the Cross and whispers: "God takes the responsibility and bears the punishment."

Reason cries: "Who is God? What is God? The Name stands for the unknown. It is blasphemy to say we know Him."

The Church kisses the feet of the dying Christ and says: "We must worship the Majesty we see."

That, I think, is to speak good of His Name.

II

“WHITHER SHALL I GO FROM
THY SPIRIT?”

Psalm CXXXIX.

THIS PSALM, chosen that it may speak good of God's Name, is held by many scholars to contain the highest peak of Hebrew poetry. Not even the sublimest passages in Job tower above five or six verses of the One Hundred Thirty-Ninth Psalm. Is it because God saved this loveliest voice to speak the loveliest thing of his Name that we shall ever hear? Other Psalms tell us where God is; *this Psalm tells us that there is no place where God is not!* It speaks then of God's Immanence; of His Omnipresence, of His Everywhereness. If it speaks in the most sublime poetry, it speaks also in the artless faith of that little crippled child whose father had given her a blackboard. The father was an unbeliever, and, dearly as he loved his little daughter, he yet thought it his duty to teach her what he held to be truth. One morning, before he went to his work, he printed on the blackboard this sentence: "God is Nowhere." The little girl spelled out the sentence: "G-o-d I-s N-o-w H-e-r-e." That is what the Psalmist is saying

in this great poetry. God is now here. But God is everywhere. There is no place where God is not.

But let me quote these few verses which even in our English translation of them are of surpassing beauty:

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

May I presume to quote these verses as I have paraphrased them in rhymed verse, greatly as I shall wrong that language of their original, which, alone perhaps of all languages, could look upon the Face of God and live:

Though I take the wings of morning
To the utmost sea,
Yet my soul hath no sojourning
To outdistance thee.

Though I climb to highest heaven,
'Tis thy dwelling high;
Though to Death's dark chamber given,
Thou art standing by.

If I say, the darkness hides me,
Turns my night to day;
For there is no darkness with Thee;—
Shadows must away!

Even so thy hand shall lead me,
 Flee thee as I will;
 And thy strong right arm shall hold me:—
 Bid me, then, Be still!

Now the mischief of it all is this, that this Psalm which speaks the very best that could be said of God's Name has been by many misunderstood to speak ill of God's Name. I do not pretend to have read all commentaries that have been written upon these verses; to have heard or read all sermons that have been preached on them. But I can scarcely recall one that has not made of this Psalm, a kind of celestial Detective Story! This immanent and transcendent God is a Sleuth, a Super-G-Man! In truth, you cannot escape Him, for He is shadowing you everywhere! Climb to heaven if you will; He will be there spying upon you! Make your bed in hell; He will dog you to that doom! Take the wings of the morning if you like, His wings will beat you down! No uttermost sea, no darkness shall separate or hide you from the great G-Man, who is God!

Well, that is good paganism; that idea of a celestial Sherlock Holmes was not the religion of the Psalmist. The Greeks said: “The gods see; the gods see everywhere.” But when the Greeks said that, they meant that the gods were spying on them, that with no pity they beheld them. They did not mean at all what poor Hagar meant, there in the wilderness, when she said: “Thou, God, seest me.” Hagar might be lost, but she was not lost from God. And her poor little Ishmael there, cast out by his father, and now forsaken by his distracted mother, throws out his voice. There is no one in sight,

so the lad cries to some one out of sight. But it is to no mighty Truant Officer that the lost child lifts his cry. "And God heard the lad." That was what Jesus taught us about God. That was what the simple hymn says: "I go to the desert to seek my sheep."

Yes; that is what Jesus taught. But this Psalm was written a great while before there spake in our world Him who spake as never man spake. Can you imagine the immense departure of this Psalmist from the tribal theologies of his contemporaries, or from their earliest theologies?

There was the lad, Jacob, leaving the tent of his father. He has upon his lips his mother's kiss, and he has the blessing of his father's trembling hands, and he has all that he possesses upon his back, and he is on his way. Over the hill yonder, and his last sight of home will be hidden from his eyes. Beyond that earth-line the cheerful call of shepherds, the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle and the barking of dogs and the shrill cries of childish playmates and the laughter of women will have become a silence. He is alone now, alone, and even now, homesick. He is horribly alone when night comes down upon a windy hillside, and he makes the earth his bed and a hard boulder his pillow. He is alone with an aloneness that no traveller of our time can know. For he believes that he is lonely of God. He believes, as every one then believed, that God is the God of the family altar. God is back there in the huddle of tents that was once the lad's home. There is no "Now I lay me down to sleep" for this far-wandered lad. But at last, sleep comes—and Jacob dreams. And in his dream, from

that “wide and starry sky” there is let down a shining ladder, a ladder that touches the hillside, but the top of it is against the door-sill of heaven, and angels have traffic on it, running swiftly down it, touching the dreaming lad with their wings. And in the dream, God said: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest . . . for I will not leave thee.” And when Jacob was awake, he said: “Surely the Lord is in this place. . . . How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” John Ruskin reminds us that men have graven those words over the doors of their churches, “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” And Ruskin also reminds us that they were first heard by a dreaming lad on a dreary, wind-swept moor.

I am telling a familiar story out of this old Bible. Is it so familiar that we forget how far we have come! When we sing that hymn, inspired by that incident, do we remember of whom we sing? Ages before those words shaped themselves in the singing heart of Sarah Flower Adams, they sang low in the heart of the homesick Jacob:

Though like the wanderer,
Weary and lone,
Darkness comes over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

But let us turn now to another affirmation of this Psalm.

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It affirms not only that God is our Great Companion in this life, but in any other life that is to be. In the most familiar version of the Psalm—the King James version—the inspired poet says, "If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." I suppose that many who have read that sentence for years, namely, "If I make my bed in hell," have taken that "hell" to mean either the place of future punishment, or perhaps, if they believe that "we get our hell in this world," that it means some hell of earthly remorse or misery or woe. Well, if the Psalmist did mean that, I should believe that he was right. I should, and do, believe that God will be in any hell to which the sinner may go, either in this world or in any world to come. I believe that the soul, in any hell, or "condition" or state, if that soul but turn to God, God will be there to pardon and restore that soul. Jesus once spoke of an unpardonable sin. But we know what an unpardonable sin is. It is the sin of final impenitence. If there is impenitence, God cannot, of course, forgive it, for the primary requirement of forgiveness is penitence. It is important to know this, for it is the Gospel. But it is not what the Psalmist is declaring here.

The word that the Psalmist used was "Sheol." In his language, "Sheol" meant the abode of the departed. It was not an altogether happy place in Hebrew belief, not even for the righteous. Jesus purified that "Sheol" when He called it Paradise. In the Apostles' Creed, it is called "hell"—where we say of Jesus that "He descended into hell." And so the most familiar version of the Psalm translates it "hell"—"If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." It means that the soul

can never go where God will not be its Companion. That is what Jesus said to the Penitent Thief. That dying thief was to go beyond “the wings of the morning”; he was going beyond the “uttermost parts of the sea.” But he was not going beyond the companionship of Christ! “Today,” said Jesus, “thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” So they went on, both together. It was what Jesus said again: “Where I am, there shall ye be also.”

Let me say, then, that we have in this Psalm, the greatest thing that is said of our immortality, excepting, of course, the declarations of Jesus Christ Himself. And I could not better close this meditation, which has failed as I knew it would fail in dealing with so mighty an utterance, but I could not better close this matter than by reminding you of that unforgettable incident which St. Augustine gives of the death of his mother, the sainted Monica. It was that time when Augustine and his mother rested at Ostia, waiting for the voyage. An artist has put that time of waiting on canvas, showing us the strong yet troubled face of Augustine, silhouetted against a soft, evening cloud. And there is the rapt, angelic, patient face of Monica. Augustine is sore troubled for his mother, for she is gravely ill, and he fears that she may not support the long sea voyage. She did not take that voyage—not that one—for the sainted Monica died there at Ostia. But before she died, she breathed this Psalm of God’s everlasting immanence into the soul of her son. “Does it matter,” she asked him gently, “whether it be there or here? His Presence will be the same, either here or there. No wings of the dawn

can outstrip Him; no curtain of the dark can shut Him out. Our sea is not so wide that it surpasses that which is the uttermost, yet on the uttermost sea, and beyond it, His hand still guides and holds. It does not matter where you lay my body; so I bid you be no more sorrowful. Remember, my son, no one can ever be far from God!"

Let me say then, again, that outside of the Gospels—nay, outside only those portions of the Gospels where the Risen Christ Himself stands with dominion over death—outside those affirmations alone, there is nowhere such affirmation of our immortality as in this Psalm. It is like the Risen Christ Himself, as He companioned with those despairing disciples on that first Easter afternoon. It opens to us, as He did, all the Scriptures of the Immortal Hope. It goes with us to our poor earthly homes, and it breaks for us our mortal bread, making the bread sweeter for the Guest who shares it with us. And it abides with us, as the Risen Christ abode with that twain in their Emmaus cottage, abides with us because "the day is far spent." I pray that our meditation of this mighty Psalm may have caused our "hearts to burn within us," while it has talked with us by the way, and while it has opened to us the Scriptures of Immortal Companionship. May we carry from it the conviction that no one can ever be far from God.

III

“OUT OF THE DEEP”

Psalm CXXX

THIS PSALM speaks good of God's Name in a voice of prayer. It is the One Hundred Thirtieth Psalm—the *De Profundis*. It takes its name from the first petition of the prayer: “Out of the deep have I cried unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.”

This is not a common prayer. It is not like the simple prayer that we lisped in childhood, “Now I lay me down to sleep.” It is not so simple as we make the prayer that our Lord taught His disciples, when having lost Him overnight, they climbed the hill and found Him kneeling with something brighter than the morning streaming from the opened heavens upon His face. As we say that prayer, we make it very simple. Just a few simple petitions; that God's Name may be holy; that His kingdom may come; that His will may be done on this earth; that we may have bread for today; that we may be forgiven, as we forgive. Did I say that prayer is simple? Not that last petition about forgiveness; that is not simple though we may make it so with common use of it. If we really understood what we pray so glibly, we should not think it simple; we should perhaps find our-

selves in a deep that we know not of. For forgiveness is there asked for on the express condition that we ourselves forgive. Is that simple? I say to you that we had better not pray at all, than to pray that prayer with an unforgiving heart.

Some weeks ago, I was preaching in a certain city. After the service, a woman came to me whom I knew to have been a communicant of the Church for many years. She said—and she said with some anger—"I want to ask you a question." She told me of a certain man who had committed a grievous fault. She said, "I was in a cathedral in another diocese, and I saw that man at the Communion. I want you to explain that to me, if you can."

I said, "What was done at that communion service?" She said, "I do not understand what you mean. The man was at the altar." I said, "I do not mean what this man was doing; you told me that; but what was the priest doing? Was he holding up a cup full of dark wine, and was he saying: 'This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sin'?" She said: "Yes, he said that, of course." "Then," I said, "that answers your question; that is why the man was there. Have you another question?" She said, "Well, I cannot forgive him." I said, "You do not have to forgive him, not on his account; but you had better forgive him on your own, as you value your soul." She said, "I don't know what you mean." "I can believe that," I said, "or you would not make the statement you just made. Do you know the Lord's Prayer?" She said, "Of course I know the Lord's Prayer." "But do you

really know it? Do you know the very pith of that prayer? It is on the sole condition that we forgive others that we are to be forgiven ourselves. Our Lord gave us that prayer, and that particular petition He bought and paid for with His most precious blood!”

Now I am not a superstitious person, and the roof of that fine church looked substantial enough. But I moved over in the pew just to be on the safe side. I do not want to be near such people. I do not want to be sitting under things that might fall when they are in such a mood. But I could not get that woman with her angry face out of my mind. I drove that afternoon, over icy roads to another church; but I was thinking, “Dear God, could there be another like her; another of the millions who profess and call themselves Christians? I preached that evening in a little church. But as I looked into the faces of those people in the pews, I kept wondering are any of these like her? Are there many like that, “as if Jesus had never lived, as if He had never died”? Do they let that petition in the Lord’s Prayer trip off their lips and not even know in what deeps they are? That is a case for Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Celestial Surgeon” to take His sharpest pleasure, and stab their spirits broad awake!

There are, of course, others in the depths who seem to be only conscious of the depths and not conscious of any heights at all. It is said that there are multitudes who never pray at all. I hope that is not true; but if it is true, is it, as Tennyson said, that they are not better than sheep or goats who lift not hands in prayer? Is it not that they are human—far too human?

Sometime ago a man who calls himself a Humanist said in a religious journal that the great poets were too wise to pray to a Person who does not exist as a Person. They pray, he said, to the great elements, or to this or that spirit, like "the Spirit of '76," and he proceeded to cite some twenty of the poets who invoked only the elements. Like Byron, for instance, which instance he gave, crying "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll." As I read the article of the distinguished Humanist, I said to myself, "Surely, he must be mistaken. Surely, Byron was not so foolish as to pray to the ocean. Suppose Byron was in the ocean—I know he was a good swimmer—but, suppose he was in the deep too far to swim. Would Byron, out of the deep, cry only to the deep? Would he really pray, "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll"? That is just the trouble. The ocean is doing far too much rolling for the drowning poet, as it is! I grant you that Byron might have prayed to a Personal God out of that deep, and that Personal God might not have saved Byron from a grave in the deep.

Tennyson tells of one: "O mother, praying God to save thy sailor; while thy head is bowed, his heavy shotted hammock shroud drops in his vast and wandering grave." That is true. But suppose that mother had prayed, not to God; but to that "vast and wandering grave" not to swallow up her son? Would that have been better? Tennyson would not have said so; and Byron would not have said so. Well, it did not take me long to find a passage in Byron's poems where he prayed to a Person, and where he prayed to

a Person through a Person who once walked this earth!

I took every poet the Humanist had named, and in a deadly parallel, I sent to the journal which had printed the article, explicit examples of where these poets had prayed to a Person, and not to an element. The distinguished Humanist's reply, his most courteous reply, was that I had convicted him by his own witnesses. Nevertheless, he said that the poets did pray to inanimate Nature. Surely they did, that is very like poets. One in the Old Testament did that; but he modified his prayer by saying: “Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of Him!”

Again, there are those in the depths who are conscious only of the depths, not because of any humanistic philosophy; but because they are too human. The human world absorbs them wholly. I heard the other day of a man who was an employee in the subway. A man said to him in the underground station, “I want to find a certain street when I reach the surface. Can you tell me where it is?” The subway employee said, “Don't ask me about anything up there, Mister; I don't know about anything up there.” There are many of us who are ignorant “of anything up there,” and with less excuse than that subway employee. We seem to be ignorant “of anything up there,” though we walk under the skies and the stars!

Again, I know there are those who are in the depths, and yet who do not cry out of them. They are stoic souls, like Henley, when he wrote *Invictus*. Their prayer is Henley's fierce prayer:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods there be
For my unconquerable soul.

That may be a brave prayer; but it is a very foolish prayer. It is foolish, because no soul is unconquerable, and Henley's soul was not unconquerable. It is foolish in the second place, because there is no night that is black as the pit from pole to pole. Somewhere God's sun shines and it is broad day; and the light that men have hailed sometime in its rising will not forever set and leave them in the dark. No man has ever seen God's last star. As a matter of fact, Henley's "unconquerable soul" was conquered, and he lived to sing a far lovelier gospel than his *Invictus* ever knew. I suppose, for thousands who know *Invictus*, there are comparatively few who know that later and lovelier poem, in which Henley speaks of the night over Edinburgh, a night, not black as the pit from pole to pole; but a night whose curtain Henley said was a benediction, and where an influence "luminous and serene" cast on the old, gray city in whose hospital Henley had passed so many wingless hours of pain, a shining peace. "Night," he says now; "not night black as the pit"; but "night with her train of stars and her great gift of sleep." Ah, Henley, you lived to cry out of the deep, not to whatever gods there be of your unconquerable soul, but to that tender God who said: "All souls are mine."

Well, granting that we are conscious of the depths; and I am sure that we all do send agonizing cries out

of very real deeps; when we send up those strong cries to God, there comes, or there should come, the consciousness that we are not praying alone. We are not alone in the deep. God who is up there, is now down here with us.

It is so with the Psalmist in *De Profundis*. A moment ago, he was crying alone out of the deep. He felt that God was so far away that he must cry loudly to Him: “Lord, hear my voice. O, let thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint.” He is praying quietly now. “There is mercy with thee; therefore shalt thou be feared.” We know that it would be nearer to what the Psalmist meant to say, “Therefore shalt thou be revered, or worshipped.” But, we ought not, and we cannot, take all fear, all awe of God out of worship. As an old Saint used to say: “He that worships God in fear, that is well; he who worships Him in love, that is better; but he who in fear can love, that is best of all.” “There is mercy with thee.” How does the man know that? He could not know it except that God had come into the very pit with himself.

Portia said that the quality of mercy was this, that it fell like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. How often we have seen the heavens terrible with storm, and then the rain fell and the storm-cloud passed. But mercy was no gentle rain around Calvary. Mercy was so deep there that it was fathomless as midmost ocean around that Cross. We do not need to call it down; we must not think that it is only wishful thinking in the deep where we are. How beautifully does Whittier express it in the hymn:

We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For him no depths can drown.

The Psalmist discovered that God in His mercy was there with him in the pit. A long time afterward St. Paul discovered the same thing, and said: "The Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer with groanings that we ourselves could not utter." And a long time after St. Paul, St. Basil, and after him St. Thomas Aquinas said: "Prayer means a lifting up of the soul to God; that is one side of it; and a descent of the Spirit of God into the human soul; that is the other side of it."

If we doubt the inspiration, the timelessness, of this *De Profundis*, let us but see how it anticipates the Word made Flesh to dwell amongst us; the making of Jesus to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus knew the pit to its deepest depths. I once heard Doctor Joseph M. M. Gray tell of a very righteous man, a stern and austere president of a college who severely punished his son because he had climbed the garden fence and dropped down onto a neighbor's premises. The boy had been forbidden repeatedly, and he had been repeatedly guilty. The father whipped him severely. Very soon afterward the son died, not, of course, as a result of the punishment; but from natural causes. The father loved the lad dearly and was prostrated with grief. He could not forget that he had dealt harshly with the lad, and he began to imagine excuses for him. One day the neighbors were astonished to see that grave and austere man

astride the garden fence, and making as if he would fall into the neighbor's yard.

Well, Christ did that. He came down here and put Himself in our places. He put His hands on oars that the hands of fishermen had handled. He went and talked and ate with publicans and sinners. He wrote with His finger in the dust of a street through which an adulteress had been dragged; He sat at the table of a despised tax collector; He made a gibbet His bed, with a thief on one side and on the other. If we can pray out of any darkest pit we know, and not know that there is Mercy there beside us—then let us go back to the beginning and cry again, “Lord, hear my voice.”

Lastly the Psalmist does not have to tell us that we must have patience in prayer; even when that prayer is an agonized cry out of the deep. To know that there is Mercy with Him to whom we pray is, of course, a tremendous answer. But we may have to wait before that Mercy is fully manifest. The Psalmist thinks that it may be through a long, long night. For he adds to the cry, “My soul fleeth unto Thee before the morning watch, I say before the morning watch.” The translation in the King James version of the Bible helps us here: “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say more than they that watch for the morning.”

How valid to human experience that is! We who are well and have for some reason to watch, how well we can do it until the wee, but wingless hours begin to drag. If we are sleepless at all, the hours before the morning are the hardest. It is so, of course, because the vital

forces are at their lowest ebb in the hours before the dawn. How easily the mind then can subdue the diminished physical powers, and dark things can come up from their hatches and take command. They flee when we are up and dressed; but they hag-ride us in those early hours. It is harder when we are sick. We remember those words of Tennyson:

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;¹

And one's eyes do not have to be dying to note how slowly that square of window takes on the morning light.

But the Psalmist says, "I will wait for Him; I will wait before the morning watch; I will wait for Him more than they that watch for the morning!" Surely He will come. One night on the Lake long ago, it is related, the disciples were in a boat, and they were in trouble in troughey seas and on a head-wind. They had glimpsed Him on the shore before the night came down; but the night was down now. "It was dark," they said afterwards, "and Jesus had not come unto them." It was midnight and He had not come; it was the darkest hour, and at last, He came. He came in the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea. And then He would have gone past them if they had not hailed Him. He would have passed them by if the numbed lips of those chilled

¹From "Tears, Idle Tears."

and fear-worn men had not hailed Him again. *But He did come.* May our souls wait for Him, wait in the certainty of His Mercy, since that helps us to wait hopefully—but wait for Him more than they that wait for the morning.

IV

“AGAINST THEE ONLY HAVE I SINNED”

Psalm LI

THE MAN who speaks good of God's Name in this Psalm—the Fifty-first Psalm—the *Miserere* as it is called—has himself a sorely wounded name. If this poet is David, as we may presume him to be, he has wounded a kingly name, and dragged it in the dust. It would not profit us to recite the man's sins, even if we knew them; in all conscience they were bad enough! He speaks of “all his transgressions”; so many that they had drugged his conscience, and he is not delivered from that anesthesia until he is awakened from it by an accuser. I do not believe there is any one reading these lines who is as bad as this man. Be that as it may, I doubt if there is any reader who can match this man in the measureless depths of his penitence. That is why this Psalm will be forever the model of penitence for sins, be they black or white, be they many or few. We have time to take only two or three of these strong cryings for our meditation.

First, let us see how honest this man's penitence is.

He begins by speaking good of God's Name, of His great goodness, of His multitudinous mercies. Indeed, he could not have begun at all without that. Then he owns his guilt. "*I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me.*" We may thank God that, in our own eyes at least, we are better than this man. Let us devoutly pray God we may be as honest! "*I acknowledge my faults.*" "*I blame myself.*" Do you realize that the word "blame"—"b-l-a-m-e," in so far as it refers directly to one's own fault, to personal responsibility, is becoming almost an obsolete word in our language today?

A man at the head of the composing room of one of the greatest publishing houses in the world—a house that publishes serious works on ethics and religion, as well as what might be called the better fiction, said the other day: "I cannot recall when we have set the word 'blame,' meaning personal blame, in any publication of this house. The word has gone out of fashion." Not long ago one of the wisest teachers of men who are to go out to preach said: "You must say this to people. You must tell them that when they do anything that is good, they must not take the credit wholly to themselves. They must give some of the credit to their parents or husband or wife or teachers, or perhaps, a little to their pastors. And you must tell them that when they do anything that is bad, they must not wholly excuse themselves." That man was placing his finger upon the ailing spot in life. We have forgotten how to say "blame"; we have forgotten where to give credit; but we have learned with a vengeance how to

excuse ourselves. We were enticed into that evil. Or it was the malnutrition of some obscure gland that made us do that thing. Or, excuse the grammar, it was "something we et."

Do I seem to trifle, setting over against the confessed and awful guilt of this *Miserere*, this miserable failure of ours to take the blame, until it has become so much a commonplace that we laugh it off in the current slang of "passing the buck"? Think not that this is a trifle. It is from this trifling with inward truth that great tragedies grow. Face up to your faults, and there is hope for you—hope in this world, and in any world that is to come. A penetrating poet has given us the epitaph upon the tombstone of an honest lad. I cannot say, and I will not say, that he was as bad as this Psalmist; but I will say that he was as honest. This is the epitaph:

Here lies a lad whose sins were sins,
Not streptococcic orange skins,
Nor were his virtues vitamins.

He knew the rules; he knew the game;
If Hell or Heaven hold the same,
Himself, not spinach, was to blame.

But that honesty is to be found not only in a lad in a poem; I have encountered it in other places. Recently I had him with me in a motor car during a long night's drive in the Southwest. He had come to drive me to a distant city; and as we drove on through the night, he said: "Bishop, may I talk to you about my life and about my soul?" I said, "Talk on; I will

listen.” He was a fine upstanding young man of about twenty-two years. As I listened, he poured out the story of his transgressions not worse or less than the average youth. He did not excuse himself; he did not blame his companions; and he did ask with the earnestness of St. Paul, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” I do not think that long talk in the night was in vain. When we reached our destination in the wintry dawn, he said: “Bishop, I hope you will not think me queer; but it seemed to me that Jesus was riding with us in this car.” I said, “And so He was. He is where there are two or three. He was with us as surely as He was with those disciples on the lake in the night; and He would have been asleep on the pillow, if we had not called upon Him to help us. Let us not forget that He can still these wild passions in us, as He stilled that wild storm on the lake long ago.”

I have hope for that lad for two reasons. First, because he was young and his character was yet plastic. But mostly, I have hope for him because he was honest; because there was life and feeling in his soul. And this hope is for all, for the middle aged, and for the old. The familiar adage: “While there is life, there is hope,” is as true of the soul as it is of the physical body. Why do we not fear the deadly numbness that comes over our souls, as we fear its creeping through our bodies? Why do men cross this continent; why do they go to Johns Hopkins, or to Battle Creek to get a little feeling into a dead wrist; and why are they not fearful as was Saul when he said: “The Lord answers me no more”? “Thou desirest no sacrifice,” says this psalmist

later in his cry, "else would I give it Thee; but thou desirest truth in the inward parts."

But not only is this psalmist honest with himself; he is honest with his Maker. He knows that sin hurts God more than it hurts any one else. Sin does hurt the one who sins, and probably most sins hurt our fellows. And if there were only fellow-humans in this world; if this were man's universe, we would have it out with them, and that would be the end of it. But we are not alone. For instance, there is God!

No, sin is primarily and principally against God, and this man says so. "*Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*" And why must he say that? Why does he say to God, "It is You only who must deal with my sins"? He answers that question in his next breath. It is not only that all sin is directly against God; it is not only that all forgiveness of sin against God must come from God; but it is because that forgiveness must justify God when that forgiveness is given. It is to justify God; it is to clear God's judgments. "*Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and clear when thou art judged.*"

Do people judge God? Do they not judge Him all the time? Why does God have to cry out constantly against the cruelty of man's judgments? Why did the self-righteous cry blasphemy against Jesus in that house, when they let the paralytic man down through the roof? It was not, as they said, that only God had power to forgive sins. It was because they refused to believe in God's forgiveness, except through their own ceremonial

cleansings. “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy,” says our God; but human society has ever insisted upon a better reason. Why does God have to “move the previous question,” as some one has called that passage in Isaiah, where God says: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith our God; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Well, when you “move the previous question,” as some one has called this speech of God, you shut off debate. God was shutting off the debate as to whether He was color blind, and didn’t know the difference between crimson and white; as if He who made the rainbow and hung it in the sky to tell the disobedient that they should not be overwhelmed any more; as if He had not the power to make crimson white, if, in His mercy, He would!

Let me illustrate how we would take judgment and mercy out of God’s hands. There is a rubric in the Communion Office in the Book of Common Prayer, which has to do with a person’s receiving the Sacrament, which, it is held, is an avenue to God’s forgiving grace. Yet strangely enough that rubric, like the Book of Esther, does not contain the Name of God even once. It speaks of the “congregation” being offended at some one’s conduct, and that that person is, therefore, warned away from the Altar. It says that such a person is not to presume to come to the Altar until the “Congregation” is satisfied. Suppose that person were to say, “I have repented and I believe God has forgiven me.” Should we say, “We are very sorry; but this rubric

says nothing about God at all"? Suppose this Person were to say, "We have been singing, 'Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream, all the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him.' I do feel the need of Him, and I want to go to this Sacrament with Him." Should we say, "We are very sorry, but this rubric says nothing about the fitness that He requires; it speaks only of the 'Congregation' being satisfied!"

Well, who is He at the Altar, anyway? Who is that nearest Man, though we cannot see Him, and perhaps, the best of us would not dare to look into His face even if we could see Him? Can the man up there, whom He has taken to be His hands and feet; whom He has taken to carry His Sacrament up and down those Altar stairs—can he judge? Does he know, as the poet says: "Does the man before the Altar where the candle-glory beats— does he know the awe they feel there in those back seats?" It is against thee only, thou God of Golgotha; against thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!

Now we can change all this if we wish. We can go to our fellow mortals and cast down before them the miserable counters of our sin. Judas did that. He had sinned against the Figure there in Gethsemane; against the Master writhing under the soldier's lash; against the Man standing in the bright April sunlight to be judged by Pilate. The One against whom he has sinned is to be found; but Judas does not attempt to find Him! Instead, Judas did what we do; he tried to fix it with his fellows; he went to the bargainers and said:

“I have betrayed the Inocent Blood.” “Well, what is that to us?” they answered; “See thou to that.” And their answer was logical. Oh if they had only said, “Haste, thee, Judas; haste thee to Him!” Yes; if Judas had done that, what a difference it had made; if before he put that rope around his neck, and leapt through the forbidden door! I say, we do this other thing. We make rubrics about the “Congregation.” We are careful about what people think. Well, they think what the bargainers think. They say, “What is that to us? See thou to that.” Take your poor sinful heart to God. And He will take what measures of mercy He will. And in that Court, rest assured, He will be justified in His saying, and clear when He shall judge.

And, finally, this penitent is the Prodigal Son in the Old Testament. Their cries are the same: “I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” And the result of their honest penitence is the same. All the way home the Prodigal, in our Lord’s parable, rehearsed his speech. When the Father comes out to meet him, he is prepared to say it all. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired . . .” But he never finishes it. The father’s hand come down over his mouth and stops his words. “No; my son, you shall never be a hired servant in this house. In this house, you shall have the same robe and the same ring you had.” That is not the elder brother speaking in anger, “Why he hath wasted his substance.” That is not the “Congregation” in the rubric speaking that they are

not satisfied. That is God crying over the son who was lost and is found; over the son who was dead and is alive. That is God speaking who is justified in His saying, and who is clear when He is judged.

Will you have another story? We are told of St. Jerome, that on Christmas night he wished to give a present to the Infant Jesus. First he offered the Infant Jesus his monumental works on the Holy Scriptures; then his labors for the conversion of souls; then such virtues of his as he was able to offer. But all these were not what the Infant Jesus wanted. "Jerome," He said, "it is thy *sins* I wished for. Give them to me that I may pardon them."

V

“YOUR HEART SHALL LIVE FOREVER”

Psalm XXII

“WHEN I survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died,” I am really surveying the road-map of our religion. Christianity is cross-centered. With the Twenty-second Psalm as our guide, we have come to that Cross Roads today. Elsewhere in this book, in the chapter on “Noon Over Calvary,” we have tarried there where the four roads meet, peering into the dark that enveloped that meridian hour, trying to fathom the meaning of that strange “Fourth Word,” —“My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” which is the only mystery in the Martyr of Golgotha’s sermon that day.

There are two things that one may do at a cross-roads. One may stand there and ponder which way to take, which is the right way; or one may, if one is so fortunate as to find some one of whom to inquire, take the way indicated, and go straight on. We shall try today to follow the directions of the Twenty-second Psalm.

Why the Twenty-second Psalm? Because there is no

other. This Psalm is pre-eminently the Psalm of the Passion of our Redeemer. Its prophecies, though written centuries before Calvary, parallel the pages of the Evangelists of the Passion so startlingly that it is almost impossible not to believe that the Psalmist was there at the crossroads, a hearer and an eyewitness of those words and deeds. This Psalm said centuries ago, that the Sufferer should be "A reproach of men, and despised of the people." The eyewitnesses said centuries later that it was even so. The Psalm says the crowd would jeer, wagging their heads, and crying: "Cast thyself upon Jehovah, let him rescue him. Let him deliver him seeing he delighteth in him." The Evangelists report that those were the very words of the crowd. The Psalm prophesies that the Sufferer's life would be "poured out like water," that all His "bones would be out of joint,"—an exact description of the pains of crucifixion. And then that statement that makes the Sufferer say, "They pierced my hands and feet." "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." The eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion heard and saw these things. They were there in that horrid crowd. They saw the nails driven home; they saw the dislocation of the joints when the Cross was raised and jolted into its socket; they heard the mockery and the spitted hate; they knew that not one word escaped the Sufferer, for the Cross was not high and lifted up, as the artists picture it, but so low that the feet of the Crucified almost touched the ground. The eyewitnesses saw dimly in the fading light, the soldiers dicing for the seamless robe. All this, they saw and heard. But what of this nameless

poet, who, ages before, saw it and heard it too? Careful scholars tell us that we must tread softly over these Messianic prophecies in the Psalms. Doubtless we must. But the poets are not so careful. Let us see:

In 1842, Tennyson published *Locksley Hall*. In that poem there was a prophecy, among many others, of aerial navigation, of aerial warfare. Tennyson wrote in that year:

When I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be.—

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens filled with shouting, and there rain'd a
ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue.

Tennyson wrote those lines in 1842. In 1903, the Wright brothers managed to maneuver, in the air at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the first modern aeroplane. Now imagine—for, mind you, the poet Tennyson did imagine it—imagine, that more than half a century before what we know as the modern aeroplane even existed in the mind of man; before its commercial possibilities were dreamed; before its use as a destroyer of peoples and cities was dreamed, an English poet said the last word of aerial commerce and aerial war! There is the reason, of course, why the poet is always the prophet, the seer, the man before the event. The poet must perforce take excursions into the infinite that the

prose writer does not take. Almost any word may serve the prose writer, any one of a dozen synonyms; but not so the poet. For him, there must be one word, one measure, one rhyme, and for that word he must sometimes seek beyond the stars. But when he finds that word, and brings it to his poem, it is freighted with a meaning that prose can never know. Enough of this, however; we see that poetry may be prophecy; we see why the author of the Twenty-second Psalm *could* describe the Crucifixion.

But this Psalm was not only a description of the Crucifixion. It was the Psalm of the Crucified Himself. He chose it for that central hour. He chose it, so to speak, to die on! Men have often done that. Take Tennyson, of whom we have just been speaking. His son has told us of "that night of wondrous moonlight," when the great poet lay majestic in the final weakness, and his beloved Shakespeare, for which he had asked, open on the couch before him, open at that passage in *Cymbeline*:

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that Jesus should have done that? His own words had been spoken; His first word that none other could have spoken; that word of which it has been truly said, that it was the kindest word and the truest word about our humanity that ever has been said, that ever will be said: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!" That word had been said. And He had said that second word

to the Penitent Thief: "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." And He had made that provision for His Mother, giving her into the keeping of His Beloved Disciple. What more is there for Him to do but to rest—and to die!

So our Lord, if we may reverently say so, "His wages taken, and the long day done, and in His Heart some late lark singing, is gathered to the quiet West." What if that "late lark" that sang for Him was this Twenty-second Psalm. At any rate, He quoted from it, framed with His dying lips, its first sentence: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I know, of course, that there are those who insist that He really did feel that God had forsaken Him; that God had forsaken Him at the very moment when he had fulfilled God's utmost will; that having Himself taken the hand of a dying thief to pilot him to Paradise, He Himself despaired of ever getting there; if people can believe that, and say it, and then, when the implication of it strikes them, can apologize for thinking it and saying it;—if there be such people, I say, they will be shocked at the suggestion that the Twenty-second Psalm was a "late lark" singing in the heart of the dying Redeemer.

But let us look at the whole Psalm. Many penetrating scholars, beginning with St. Jerome, have contended that Jesus recited the entire Psalm. Indeed, some scholars hold that He not only repeated the Twenty-second, but on through the Twenty-third, and to the Thirty-first, which contains the last word He said, "Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit." He could easily

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have said all the Psalms, of course, for the dark was long. And He could have said these Psalms from memory, and from choice, for they had been as His daily bread to Him all His life. The fact that the Evangelists tell us only that He said: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" does not mean, of course, that He may have said only that opening sentence of the Psalm. If I were reporting a service in church, and I wrote that the choir sang: "We praise thee, O God," every one familiar with such a quotation would understand, of course, that the choir sang the entire *Te Deum*. The Evangelists tell us that Jesus began to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"; they may not have felt it necessary to add that He went on repeating, mounting, exulting in His soul those remaining sentences concerning this God who is "throned on the praises of Israel"; this God who hath not hid His face from His Beloved, but "when He cried unto Him, He heard"; this God whose "praise shall be in the great congregation"; this God, who, so far from forsaking that bravest Heart, declares here that "your Heart shall live forever"; this God who was so pleased with what His only begotten Son accomplished upon the Cross, that it would be said that: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born."

I said there were two ways to survey this crossroads of our religion. We may halt where the roads themselves cross; where the Cross is, and lingering there and

listening, we may say this is the cry of a defeated God. We may say that a cry of defeat is a proper cry to make from a cross. We may say that it is a comfort to hear *Him* making that cry of forsakenness, since I have felt myself forsaken so often. And we have felt forsaken, and have said so. But when we have said that, we have not, just before it, absolved a multitude for the sins they have committed in their blinded sight! We have not promised a man that he will be in Paradise that day! A man to whom that is said, who is even then dying, will not easily forget it; he will be lifting his eyes, heavy with their pain, up to the face of the Man who said it, and he will be moving his head, so far as the gibbet allows, that his ear may miss no other word that the Man may utter that day. That thief will not like to hear, and I hope he did not hear, any cry of dereliction from the Man who is strong enough to cover His murderers with a shield of prayer; who can give away Paradise, as though it were a parcel of His own garden. Would this dying thief even have believed it? He did not believe, of course, as we do, that the Man on the central Cross was God. But was He *better* than God? For the Man on the central Cross had not forsaken *him*, thief and murderer though he was! He had asked only to be *remembered* in Paradise. The Man on the central Cross said, “You shall *have* Paradise.” Oh, no; the Man could not be better than God. The Man could not be forsaken of God. That did not make sense. And so the Voice went on in the mounting stanzas of the Psalm: “Thou hast heard me . . . Thou art enthroned on the praises of Israel . . . your heart

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shall live forever . . . this righteousness shall not be only here on Golgotha . . . but this righteousness shall be declared unto a people that shall be born!"

"Who is the Sufferer?" asks Doctor Alexander Mac-laren, beginning his comment on this Psalm in *The Expositor's Bible*. "Who is the Sufferer whose wail is the very voice of desolation and despair, and who yet dares to believe that the tale of His sorrow will be a gospel for the world?" Doctor Maclaren is asking who is the author of this Psalm? So far as I know, the question remains unanswered. But whoever wrote it and enshrined it in the praises of Israel, it does not stand alone. Compare it, as we are almost bound to do, with that suffering servant of God in the Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah. That too begins on a note of pain, but it mounts, as our Psalm does, until the bugles are blowing to victory:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. . . . It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;

because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Thus two great passages lay upon the scroll of Hebrew prophecy. Either of those passages, or both of them, might better have been put above the head of the crucified Redeemer than the inscription Pilate put there. Jesus wrote the theology of those passages on Calvary; nay, He was that theology. But they do not learn that theology aright, I think, who linger too long at that particular spot where the two ways meet. A crossroads is a place through which you may go upon a journey. If the road goes through hell, it may yet lead up to heaven. O sublime Psalm of the Passion, sing on; and guide our pilgrim feet into the way of peace!

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